

Gothic is the New Iraq

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

Why gothic?

I am a father of three children... I am a religious man who fears God... I have nothing to do with political or religious denominations... God protect you ... I am just an ambulance driver... before the invasion and since the invasion... I swear by God and his noble prophet (Blasim 162)

This excerpt is from Hasan Blasim's "The Reality and the Record" a short story in his famous collection *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq*. It tells a story of an ambulance driver who is seeking a humanitarian asylum in one of the European countries. He seeks asylum after falling victim to the different terrorist groups who destroyed Iraq after the American-led invasion in 2003. It all starts when he is sent on a mission to save lives near the bank of the Tigris. Instead of saving some lives he finds there:

the policemen were standing around six headless bodies. The heads had been put in an empty flour sack in front of the bodies. The police guessed they were the bodies of some clerics. . . the police piled the bodies onto the ambulance driving by my colleague Abu Salim, and I carried the sack of heads to my ambulance" (Blasim 158).

That night was rainy, and gloomy, except for the "American helicopter patrolling" the Iraqi sky for terrorists. On his way to the hospital to deliver the sack of heads a police car stops the ambulance driver. From that car descends men disguised as police officers; they took both the bag of heads and the driver himself. He is terrified believing that his head is going to be in the bag with the rest. As he continues, he is forced to appear in a video along with the six heads reading from a paper on behalf of a group of jihadists. The paper states that he is:

an officer in the Iraqi army and these were the heads of other officers, and that accompanied by my fellow officers I had raided houses, raped women, and tortured innocent civilians; that we had received orders to kill from a senior officer in the U.S. Army, in return for large financial rewards. (Blasim 164).

When the video becomes a hit and is seen by many viewers, the ambulance driver is sold to another jihadist group. The video this time is for “the Islamic Jihad Group, Iraq Branch”. He is forced to wear “white dishdasha” and read from a paper that states “I belongs to the Mehdi Army and I was a famous killer, I had cut off the heads of hundreds of Sunni men, and I had support from Iran” (Blasim 167). Each group will move him to different place that belongs to them. For the third group’s video he appears to belong to “Sunni Islamists groups” and that he killed Shiite by “blowing up mosques and public markets”. He spends a year and a half in that manner and appears as myriad of characters including “treacherous Kurd, an infidel Christian, a Saudi terrorist, a Syrian Baathist intelligence agent or a Revolutionary Guard from Zoroastrian Iran”. All the videos are broadcasted on different channels and are discussed on different shows and all are making money for those groups.

The stories of contemporary Iraq are hard to narrate. They are scary, bizarre, and the brutality in them is strange. After years of political oppression, wars and imprisonment they find their way out. Their authors were silenced, oppressed and exiled. When chance allowed them to tell their stories, after the American-led invasion, they felt trapped. They don’t know where to start and with what to begin their tales. The invasion doesn’t end violence of the war, it brings out new forms of misery and death. Consequently, motivated by the grisly atmosphere the Iraqi writers try to tell to the world stories of critical situations that are full of suicidal bombers, kidnapping and torture, sadness and pain. They also attempt to distill the Iraqi parts into a cohesive whole. The years from 2003 onward witnessed a renaissance in Iraqi literary production that has garnered global attention and won several awards.

The new Iraqi texts still need a style or a literary form that can help them record stories of this grisly situation. A literary form that allows them to stitch body parts into one, or enables the

dead to tell their own stories, or master killers exhibit the dead as pieces of art. A literary form that on one hand makes the sight of ghosts acceptable and talking to jinn's justifiable and on the other hand allows monsters, murderers and terrorist to switch places with victims.

Contemporary literature in Iraq has needed to change its artistic strategy because it is hard to relate to old forms of literature that were used in Iraq before the invasion. Therefore writers like Sinan Antoon, Ahmed Sa'adawi and Hassan Blassim modify the contemporary texts by ignoring war poetry and some romantic works of fiction of the previous decades. They instead have chosen contemporary gothic style in particular because within it the presence of supernatural elements and monsters is necessary, as they represent human's fear and mirrors reality in fantastic way. The gothic also has an influence that is beyond written stories; it has morals and lessons to broadcast and help "exploring personal and social fears about class, race and ethnicity" (Brown and etal 3). The gothic also helps to develop new perspectives and concepts concerning the presence of evil as well as the idea of horror, especially at the hands of Cormac McCarthy. McCarthy believes that evil as a source of horror "is not a threat from the outside" element and not as an "opposition to good, but as a pervasive inescapable reality, as decay and rot in the physical world, and as deformity and moral corruption in human" (Cited in Brown and etal 4). Informed by that, some writers imitate the western gothic; others modify it by quitting the norms of traditional narratology. The setting of the contemporary gothic text shouldn't be "hidden passage way or secret, forbidden, closed-off portion of a castle" as in *The Castle of Otranto*, or a science lab as in *Frankenstein*. Those places prove their ability to induce fear inside the reader and communicate the author's message that "you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle" where a door can open by itself or a stitched up corpse come to life by thunder (ibid 2). Contemporary Iraqi authors create gloomy and deserted places where death and fear can easily be identified like a

crowded restaurant as in Blasim's "The Iraqi Christ", a decayed house as in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, or the shrouding bench in *The Corpse Washer*. Truly, they add new places where all the gothic elements can be found, such as a river bank, a school, a truck, a library or places where the suicide bomber decides to push the button in his/her belt, or where cars explode, shattering blood and flesh of victims everywhere.

Contemporary authors also believe in the power of the characters in the gothic text because "vampires and zombies have proven to be particularly frightening embodiments of fears, as the ability of these monsters to reproduce through contamination leads to a continued threat when victims become monsters themselves" (ibid 3). The characters in gothic texts can be anything a monster, a zombie, a walking dead, a jinn, a ghost and they bring with them then new theme of humans with a terrorist spirit. Their role in exposing reality to the world is mixed with fear and suspense therefore it is pleasurable.

Through the use of a gothic, writers are also able to deploy themes of political crisis and the sufferings of the Iraqi citizens directly. Fear as "a social act which occurs within a cultural matrix" (Ingebretsen 25) passed through certain stages in Iraqi literature. First, it is seen as a dominant feeling that appears in every violent occasion. Then, it is naturalized after the Iraqis are accustomed to its presence because it is normal to be afraid of war, political harassment, aggressive enemy and an invasion. Finally, it turns into a motive for revenge or escape. It unleashes the monster inside the Iraqis and creates the kind of brutality that results in more deaths. Here, through this process of pain, fear, and monsters; fiction appears to speak for those who have lost their voices. Gothic, as a new genre, appeared from the womb of Iraqi reality to show that the mayhem in Iraq has worsened. Writers succeeded in creating gothic texts that combine pain with fear to historicize these moments of unforgettable tragedy. They stress the horror in their texts by their

frank treatment of daily life, and giving their characters the voice that untimely death will take away from them. Their daily encounters with violence are extensive, first by the coalition and its aftermath, second by Iraqis against themselves in a brutal sectarian war and the list goes on.

Those authors also intend to translate horror from reality into literature. It is a new challenge to the Iraqi writer and reader, Bahooora states that: “this burden of representation placed on literature is particularly critical in post-2003 Iraq, which has witnessed the dissolution of a coherent national space and a constricted public sphere”. Fiction in particular had lots of changes in its form and style to support the needs of both reader and writer: “the novel intervenes in this context to narrate the intensity of the horrors of war and its impact on the individual, who has often served in literature as a metaphor for the broken nation” (Bahooora 16). The “broken nation” inspired authors with stories that allowed them to aspire in this horrific world of death. Therefore we can say that a new kind of literature grew and developed in this particular time that is full of “hallucinatory horror and surreal elements as vessels for narration on conflict and violence”. Those elements “allowed for some fascinating advancements in modern Iraqi literature” (Lydia Beardmore). It is a traumatic time, and Iraqis are traumatized their trauma induced fever dreams and hallucinations served as fertile soil for the growth of contemporary gothic in Iraqi literature. Consequently authors start translating horror, which is a process of creating “a workable relation between a text’s relevance to contemporary culture, as writers are trying to show the “other side of the Iraqi war”, also trying to find “phrase(s) that reflect the horror of Iraq’s violence” as Daniel O’Connell states in “Translating Horror: Hassan Blasim’s ‘The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq’”. Their mission is not for the sake of recording a historical event, or depicting reality. They are crossing the borders between life and death, they are collecting limbs and body parts, shrouding them and giving them the chance to narrate their part of the story. They emphasize

that in the new Iraq terror is the other side of the war that is not seen.

These themes appear in novel as well as short stories. It is through these tales that for the first time in years, Iraqi writers won prizes for talking about their own country's suffering. "These Literary works depict displacement in place as parallel to the transformation of identity and the positioning of the self-regarding Otherness. At the same time, this transitioning journey inscribes its burden on the bodies and the memories of their characters" (Bleeding Subjects 2)¹. It is a burden but helps the authors in their process of translating reality as they consider using cultural, social and religious elements to present a picture of the Iraqi moment and the changes transpired in it. But we can say that it is mostly political as the texts try to narrate a "range of Iraqi experiences, reconstructing and rewriting the Iraqi past as well as engaging the difficult conditions of contemporary Iraq, often using experimental literary styles to portray a turbulent and uncertain national condition" (Bahooora 17). Therefore, the contemporary Iraqi fictional texts all deal with the present, the current moment, the sufferings of day-to-day Iraqis and their attempts to survive it. Those texts also show the ability of the Iraqi author to use this new and unfamiliar genre to support his mission to show the world the Iraqi crisis. Lydia Beardmore assures that:

It is Iraq's fiction making the most interesting waves in the genre. Using these literary devices creatively rather than borrowing from Le Guin or Atwood in attempt to emulate a well-trodden genre. The work appears to have emerged from the writers' imaginations through organic processes by which to translate their surroundings, past and present. The end resulting in hallucinatory horror stories that detail the surreal (and often comical) elements that come hand in hand with such trauma." (Lydia Beardmore)

This kind of narrative gives writers a chance to fill in the blank on the missing "accountabilities" as Bahooora calls them. Those texts try to answer the questions of what is missing, why and how Iraq has turned into this violent landscape over the last decades. It helps to explore dramatic,

Bleeding Subject is a blog in a Cartografies Literaries de la Mediterranean
<http://www.ub.edu/calitme/blog/bleeding-subjects/>

cultural and political themes and “articulate the unspeakable, lost, repressed, or deliberately silenced historical narratives of victims of this structural violence.” (Bahooora 188). Gothic allows for humor to mixed with dirt, dreams with body parts, and air with blood. Moreover, it allows writers to create monsters out of the remains of blown up body parts and let them speak in conjunction with the absence of the promised peace. The writers’ purpose is to grapple with defining the contemporary Iraq in a fictitious view point. Therefore, this study aims to investigate some contemporary Iraqi texts that fall within the category of gothic fiction. The authors of those texts see pain, horror, death and fear in every corner and sense it in every heartbeat of their follow citizens.

1.1 Monsters and Monstrosity in Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013)

Two hundred years after the publication of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Ahmed Saadawi resituates the classic monster tale in contemporary Baghdad. Rather than the Alps or Geneva in the late-18th century, the novel is set amidst the US-led invasion in 2003 to Iraq, a period that witnessed political instability, corruption, and social and cultural changes. Saadawi survived the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, observing that the outbreak of a violent sectarian war destroyed the unity of the country and resulted in its division into many minority groups. Saadawi depicts some of these grim themes by recreating the monster of *Frankenstein* in Baghdad after 2006, the year that witnessed the sectarian war’s predicament and the spread of violence to every corner. His book is not an imitation to Shelley’s book, instead it stands as a new text that defines the contemporary mode of the gothic genre. The book contains within its pages’ stories of death, grotesque monsters, and terror, in addition to inhumane consequence of 2003 war. It also shows how it is possible to have corpses laying here and there and body parts to stitch them together.

Through the use of such horrific scene Saadawi emphasizes themes of contemporary Iraqi life and the mess surrounding them.

The book tells the story of Hadi: “a man in his fifties, always filthy, rude and a drunkard” (17), who makes his living by collecting nasty old things, and the story of his walking-talking beast. Hadi sits in a café after finishing his work to tell stories to the visitors of the café and entertain them enough to sometimes buy him drinks or food. Hadi is sympathetic towards the remains of the dead body parts that were missed by the rescue teams and were flushed down the drains. He thinks that if he could collect them into one body, then they could receive a proper burial as a single body. Hadi is not scientist like Victor Frankenstein, who studied systematically how to create a living monster or give life to a body, Instead, Hadi collects the forgotten body parts, stitching them in one body for burial. He calls the body Whatitsname, which is an empty name, meaning nothing, and uses it in order to avoid using terrifying words like corpse or body which might scare off an audience of potential patrons. In the story the Whatsitsname will receive the soul of a hotel guard, not like Shelley’s thunder soul. The guard is a victim of one of the daily explosions whose whole body had disappeared and been turned into bloody rain. The quest of Hadi and Whatsitsname parallel stories of corruption in the administrative, political and even religious institutions. Saadawi, believes as many Iraqis believe, that some of the victims’ souls remain in the living world looking for their bodies that have transformed into waste.

1.2 Nightmare and slow violence invade the land of the Pomegranate’s tree in Sinan Antoon: *The Corpse Washer* (2010)

While Saadawi creates a monster in order to depict the horror of everyday life, Antoon focuses on picturing death, with an implied criticism of the governments before and after 2003.

For decades, the images of the victims of political abuse haunted Iraqi minds and disturbed their dreams. Hence, death appears scary and painful, and simulates its appetite violently after 2003. Moreover, it shows its ugly face through marks on the corpse, that parallel daily violent life. Death's acts crossed the limits of dreams, where people publicly encounter body parts scattered here and there, loaded with signs of torture.

The book tells the story of Death, which turned from shy visitor to an obtrusive and greedy consumer through the story of Jawad, a descendant of a Shiite corpse washing family, living in Bagdad. Jawad symbolizes the young men who suffered in one way or another, before 2003 and more after that date. Jawad wants to be an artist because he has the artistic talent. But his father wants Jawad to be corpse washer like him, especially after the death of Ameer, his brother, in the war with Iran. Jawad hates this job, and is afraid of touching a dead body. The text opens with a horrible nightmare of Jawad and Reem, his beloved who left him after being diagnosed with breast cancer. He sees her, asking him to wash her body and it ends with some masked men beating him, and kidnapping Reem. Jawad then realizes that death is chasing him even in his dreams "as if the awakening contact never enough to it. Isn't sufficient that I spent my whole day taking care of its guests and preparing them to lay in his lap" (8-9). He then compares death before and after 2003, and how it was "light and infrequent, as compared to today's death, that addicted our visitor till it gets obsessed" (10). Then Jawad moves to narrate the story of his family, and how he ends up working as a corpse washer. His father worked for six decades in an old place that was inherited by the family; his brother, a doctor who joined the army during the war against Iran in the 1980s and was killed there. The family lived a simple life off of the income of the corpse washing place. That place that has a pomegranate tree that sees all the dead and drinks all their water, whose fruits Jawad ate as a child. Jawad deals with death patiently, he is waiting for it to leave. Unfortunately

death refuses to leave even after taking Jawad's father and friend to his world. From the first sight of death, Jawad starts to have nightmares, which increase the cruelty of his present by keeping him imprisoned with death day and night. Antoon tries to create a gothic text that carries the real life experiences of many Iraqis, with dark, scary and gloomy atmospheres that expresses the depth of pain and misery on the face of both the livings and the dead.

1.3 Macabre Gruesomeness in Hassan Blasim: *The Corpse Exhibition, and Other Stories of Iraq* (2015)

The text is a collection of short stories that takes readers to a place where war is a monster, and the destruction of buildings is nothing when compared with the destruction of the human soul. Blasim pictures the annihilation of the human soul as gothic, as in the "The Corpse Exhibit" and "The Berlin Truck". Blasim believes that the constant presence of terror is resembling a devil or a beast within the human society. The smell of death spreads all over the book, and it invades the reader's nose from the first page. War, in its part is responsible for the destruction of many values, but human nature is the primary reason for it. Through stories of death and immigration, Blasim adds new elements to the gothic genre like bitter anger and the disaster of unleashing the human monster, where each tells the metaphysics of death and fantasy. He investigates human nature considering it the creator of terror when surrounded by death. Both the living and the dead appear in this text, each expressing his desire to be in the other world, or to seek a justification for the reason for being there. The dead narrate their miseries, seek any possible audience for their stories, and long to be part of the living world. The living world, on the other hand, is not peaceful or safe it is full of death.

Blasim believes that Iraq is brutal and gruesome, and macabre stories are narrated by Iraqis about their death by Iraqis. Gothic Iraq is not only the product of the dictator's abuse of power,

but also of the Iraqis themselves as he records in “Berlin Truck”. This story shows the dark side of the human soul, the chaotic foundation between reality and appearances through the story of unnamed characters who sought in exile a better life. Their illegal escape from Iraq to Turkey then to Berlin drove them to catastrophic end. They were trapped in a truck that is supposed to take them to Berlin. Days of isolation, hunger and fear are enough to mix their blood with their dirt. The police are amazed to see a flying monster when finally they opened the door. A monster who has left a chaotic mess behind. The story attracts the reader when blood is mixed with dirt, and flesh with mud emphasizing that even those who escaped Iraq took with them their brutality.

Moreover, in another story “the Corpse Exhibit”, Blasim goes inside criminals’ minds, and looks for their strategies of dealing with their victims. Through the character of the exhibitor, Blasim ignores the feeling of the victims and compromises the killer’s desires for fame. This story carries within its pages’ signs of brutality and human’s descendant into the world of evil.

1.4 Lua’y Hamza Abbas “Closing His eyes” Stories of silently tortured Iraqis (2003-2007)

It could be considered as one of the earlier stories of pain and death, one which is foundational in the formation of the gothic narrative in Iraq. In this text Abbas deals with dark and depressed souls suffered in moments of old and new violence. Abbas wonders about the reasons behind all the pain and miseries his country went through for the past three decades and how much more his country can take. He questions the benefits of writing about the reality, is violence expressible, how can any language narrate the story of pain caused by sectarian war? Unlike other fictional texts this collection historicizes psychologically tragic moments burdened with pain and fear, not events or wars. Moments of lives trying to find peace when exposed to imminent death or tortured silently . Life, for its part, appears shy and decides to hide in the darkest spot of the

body. Abbas sees salvation in closing the eye, escaping reality and fly to the world of memories. In those stories the narrator uses moments of violent actions and brutal acts to trace their impact on the human soul as in “Closing his Eyes”. The conductor in this story sees the torture of a human soul in front of him as masked men kill a person for unknown reason. He thinks this scene is brutal and familiar at the same time, and he tries to sink deeper into his memories. Captivated by that image, he closes his eyes and pitying his tortured soul that cannot escape pain even after leaving the scene.

Abbas tries to convey that psychological pain is significant to those who survive violence leading them to dark and gloomy life. In the story “ A drop of blood to discover the body” Abbas questions the body through the narrator who tries to escape an old moment from childhood. He asks: how cruel is the imagination to hold onto those moments and let them control the life?. The narrator remembers and keep on remembering a scary moment of others pain in a national holiday, when he was celebrating while other bodies were falling dead. In an interesting unity of all the stories, Abbas and his characters investigate the tortured soul of untortured body to see what kind of pain can be discovered within.

All the texts selected here agree that the relationship between death and humans resulted in creating the gothic Iraq we are seeing today. They also agree that politics contribute to this relationship. The effects of both death and politics are inevitable. All attempts of Iraqis to escape politics, challenge it or avoid it resulted in more deaths. It is fair to say that bio-politics of contemporary Iraq produced death, pain and violence. Blasim states that “literature is one form of human cognitive defiance. It’s like life, which violence cannot stop, however vicious it might be. We can’t just sit around watching and waiting. We have to get on with it”. By drawing disturbing

images that show the real effect of politics over bios we will see how monsters, nightmares and djinns roaming the streets of Iraq looking for their victims. Each chapter will discuss an effect of politics over life, and how that effect creates gothic.

2. MONSTER AND MONSTROSITY IN CONTEMPORARY IRAQ

The explosion was horrific. . . Hadi had run out of the coffee shop. He had been eating some of the beans that Ali al-Sayed made in the shop next door and that Hadi ate for breakfast every morning. On his way out of the shop, he collided with people running from the explosion. The smell suddenly hit his nostrils- the smoke, the burning of plastic and seat cushions, the roasting of human flesh. You wouldn't have smelled anything like it in your life and would never forget it. (Saadawi 20)

This scene from *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi represents the daily explosions that rocked most of the Iraqi's cities, especially Baghdad, after the American-led invasion in 2003. The stated goals of the invasion were to rescue the country from the dictatorship of the Ba'athists and fulfill many promises of freedom and democracy. Instead, the country suffered a massive sectarian war whose daily violent attacks destroyed the sanctity of life and death alike as it littered streets with body parts and bloody mist.

The new Iraq represented in the novel is a where laws are suspended, where cars blast in crowded places so they can blow up the body in the air in pieces, and then assemble it with other bodies, to form a new body, a Golem, a kind of thing from another world. It is a place where the souls of rambling victims can temporarily incarnate. Death is not rare anymore; instead, it is a constant visitor hunting the lives of the poor Iraqis resulting in many empty coffins or mixed corpses. What is seen from that day on is war, sectarian war, corruption in every living aspect and political unrest that shattered the one nation into tiny crumbs. Any attempt to stitch it up is doomed to failure because it is hard to put the different parts together again. As Michael Upchurch states, millions of Iraqis lived years in "the gantlet . . . between random bombings and scary encounters with American soldiers is so routine to them that some simply shrug it off as they go about their business". Though the corruption in the country is not the product of the

present moment. It is the outcome of previous decades of wars, poverty, and fear. Those factors, along with grisly death, are the reasons that forced thousands of civilians to escape the country.

The outbreak of the sectarian war and the breakdown of the civil society changed the typography of the population of Iraq. As a result, some Iraqis fled the country, others died and a great number of missing marked the stage. On the other hand, this type of racial fight enabled writers to treat topics of fundamental violence in their texts. Therefore, contemporary Iraqi fiction stands out to document and narrate stories of grisly reality. Through the use of gothic writers are able to narrate stories of war that the rest of the world couldn't see. It is true that those texts are fiction but within their pages are a lot of real stories of what the media tried to conceal. Monsters, goblins and djinn appear and spread in Iraqi fiction after the 2003 invasion, their presence stretches the miseries of contemporary Iraq.

Most of these works are translated into different international languages including English. Among them is *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, by the winner of the 2017 prize in Arabic fiction Ahmed Saadawi's. Saadawi is one of the contemporary writers who points to the breakdown of Iraq, and attempts to fictionalize reality in his texts. He witnessed the US-led invasion in 2003 and its continued aftermath from the sectarian war to the daily explosions, political unrest and terrorist attacks.

Frankenstein in Baghdad was first published in 2014, gaining the prize for Arabic Fiction (Booker of the Middle East) in the same year. Then an outstanding English translation appeared in 2018 attracting more attention to the book. It "emerges as an oblique and darkly humorous commentary on the self-perpetuating nature of violence" as Rayyan al-Shwaf puts it in the "Frankenstein in Baghdad by Ahmed Saadawi offer powerful Allegory". The text discusses the life of contemporary Iraq, the danger and chaos ever-present in post-Saddam

Hussein Iraq. In this text and with the help of gothic, Saadawi creates a monster out of the chaos of urban warfare where everyone becomes a combatant. To differentiate his text from other monster novels, Saadawi gives his monster a definitive mission. It is set in Baghdad of 2005, which appears as “a troubled city where the demons had broken out of their dungeons and come to the surface all at once” (Saadawi 64). Baghdad of the third millennium, a place where two contradictory images can be seen: on the surface, it’s the ordinary crowded city with people going to work in the morning. On closer look, it is the same place where people like Hadi, an old junk dealer, who makes his living out of daily encounters with antiques, carries canvas bags to collect remains of body parts. Hadi stitches the body parts together as a way to mourn death, disbelieving that his stitched corpse comes to life and starts its own mission. The stitched corpse turns into a walking, talking monster that attempts to avenge the terrorist and the corrupted government.

This chapter, thus investigates why contemporary Iraqi fiction like Saadawi’s uses monsters and how. The chapter also tries to define their nature and creation, by drawing a comparison between two texts where monsters are playing the leading role: the outstanding *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, and Ahmed Sa’adawi’s recent adaptation of the book *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013). Each of these texts represents its author’s vision and definition of the gothic as an emerging genre. *Frankenstein* is set in Europe and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* takes place in Iraq. In both *Frankenstein* texts we see an image of the state that produces monsters and exiles them from the circle of life. Our guide here is going to be Michael Foucault’s account of monsters and their relationship to law and the state in his lectures, particularly *Abnormal* (1974-75).

2.1 An overview of the legal history of monsters

Monsters are not only scary because they induce fear and bring about death, but also because they stand at the boundary between the human and non-human. Elaine Graham states, “in their exposure of the redundancy and instability of the ontological hygiene of the humanist subject... the horror of the monsters rests in their capacity to destabilize axiomatic certitudes” (Graham 12). Luciano Nuzzo, on the other hand, in “Foucault and the Enigma of the Monster” believes that “the monster is always the construction of a discourse that captures it, if only to exclude it, as ontological difference from the order of being and from the hierarchies that are constructed upon that order” (Nuzzo 68). That explains the existence of monsters, but what is the monster?

The term monster is another reference of “otherness within sameness”, its derived from the “Latin word monstrare meaning to show forth or demonstrate” (Sharpe 2007, 385). The Merriam Webster’s dictionary gives three different definitions of the word monster: It could be “an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure”, “one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character”, “a threatening force”, or “an animal of strange or terrifying shape”. All of which indicates that the monster is not a human, it is an abnormal creature with exceptional power. Moreover, the use of the word monster in contextual English legal texts came after the encounter of the society with deformed humans or children born with some kind of disability or a cultural adaptation of human-animal creature with exceptional powers, or something related to the “practice of bestiality” (Sharpe 2007, 394). The first mention of monsters in the history of English law appears in the thirteenth century with the writings of Bracton and Britton. Henry de Bracton mentions in his *On the Laws and Costumes of England* the characteristics of monsters as “those procreated perversely, against the way of humankind, as where a woman brings forth a monster or a prodigy” shall not be “reckoned among children”, that monsters are located

outside the law and must be eliminated. Later on, Britton confirms Bracton's classification by listing children born with "three hands or feet. . . shall not be admissible to any inherence or be accounted for children" (Cited in Sharpe 2007, 391). For them, the animal qualities are not part of the constitution of a monster yet. Based on that law, Foucault considers the three abnormal figures of his lectures, when masturbation was considered an act of deformity as we will see later in the chapter.

Moving to the Renaissance and particularly in 1590, the meaning behind the word monster gained much attention. The animal-human monster appears to be included in this category, especially in Henry Swinburne's canonical text, *Treaties of Testaments and Last Wills*: "the law doth not presume that creature to have the soul of a man, which hath a form and shape so strange and different from the shape of a man". Swinburne, as a lawyer and part-time judge of the Consistory court at York, believes that dog-raven and duck-headed humans are monsters, and "the product of inter-species copulation" (Cited in Sharpe 2007, 394). Later on, the distinguished law jurist Sir Edward Coke in his *Institutes of the Law and of England*, in the early seventeenth century says: "a monster, which hath not the shape of mankind, cannot be heir or inherit any land" (ibid, 392). The previous jurists agree that the deformity of the human child as having a disordered body (i.e. a hunchback, less or extra feet or fingers) is not a monster. Instead, the monster is the figure that exceeds the limits of mankind in its overall form and behavior. The same interpretation also appeared in more developed law writings of William Blackstone, in the mid-eighteenth century. Despite this, there was a call for naturalizing monsters because of the intervention of science into human life during the Enlightenment is the reason behind their presence, for Blackstone they remain outlaws. He also agrees with Swinburne's idea of human-animal hybridity and suggests

that “a monster is the product of animal paternity” (ibid, 395). He also considers any resemblance to animal in any part, not only the head, as a maker of human/animal hybridity.

The excerpts above are among the most influential legal writings on the nature and definition of monsters in English history. Presumably, some of those definitions are derived from the authors’ religious, cultural and or socio-political contexts, but they still help to trace the contemporary understanding and classification of humans and non-human monsters. It is not until modernity that “monster” as a term is removed from the English law and is replaced with more justifiable terms like “enemy”, “scapegoat” and “stranger,” all of which refer to the political monster that has some qualities of the Enlightenment or Renaissance era monsters. These changes happened due to the modern use of power, scientific interventions and the confusion of the nature and definition of the word monster and the context of its usage. The modern monster is one whose existence is not associated with its nature and reality but with the political discourse it is born in.

Nuzzo explains that: “the discourse about the monster has a performative value, produces effects of power, and emerges within a conflictual dynamic” (Nuzzo 70). He believes that this is the modern discourse to “stigmatize” people and distinguish them for racial, biological or even moral reasons. The use of political context will justify the use of power to prohibit those stigmatized from their humanity. Although monsters’ existence is seen as a source of danger to the world of the human, it is important. Especially when the term monster is used to refer to outlawed citizens in addition to “scapegoat” and “stranger.” Zygmunt Bauman notices that societies need outlaws or outsiders to constitute itself and that “society can defend itself against its strangers” (Bauman 12). In addition, their presence has a moral job as Edward J. Ingebreetsen mentions in his “Monster Making: A Politics of Persuasion”, in which he assumes that “every society needs a stigmatized person -or group of persons- whose function is to provide readily moralized example

of how not to think and act” (Ingebreetsen 26). In addition to morals their existence helps “delineate and buttress the norms of behavior and beliefs” (ibid 26) and also establish rules and canons.

Therefore modern theorists try to break down the rigid hybridity of human-animal monster. It is especially after the intensification of the internal law of Foucault that “operates as the model for understanding all forms of contemporary abnormality” (Sharpe 2007, 396). In this regard J. J. Cohen indicates in his “Monster Culture, Seven Thesis” that the monster is a cultural construction and it is either “fictitious or made in relation to living flesh” (Cohen 4). Moreover, Cohen and other theorists indicate the importance of the organic part in the constitution of the monster. Shildrick, for example, states that “the monster that effectively complicates our preconception are precisely those that are blatantly organic”, and Canguillhem insists that “the qualification of the monster must be reserved for organic beings, for there is no mineral monster or mechanical monster” (Cited in Sharpe 2010, 29). On another hand, Hanafi argues that monsters are best considered an “ideological cluster” that is “as an entity constructed and presented within a social group” (Ibid, 21). Derived from that, the monster emerges within the domain of humanity as Foucault believes, when there are humans there are monsters. Monsters’ existence is a challenge to the law of both “society and nature” and the domain of its constitution is called the “juridico-biological domain” (Foucault 56).

It is obvious that modern critics claim that monsters are not strangers, instead they are part of our constitution; that the evil inside us is monstrous and the good is human. Consequently, many authors use the image of the monster in their texts, for various reasons. Some defend their existence while others condemn it. Some see in monsters the nature of the society, its weaknesses, and concerns, others consider that their existence has a reason. No matter what, there should be a defect in the human lives that resulted in creating them. What the monsters (real or imaginary) are looking

for is the very life and rights of the human. They are living within us and among us, but do we really know what they are and why they are here, this is a matter of concern. Foucault's history of the figure of the monster, its nature and definition, are vital to this chapter and to provide more understanding of the theory of monsters. The next section, thus, will explore Foucault's basic historical and theoretical understanding of monsters.

2.2 Foucault and monsters

In his 1974-5 Lectures at the College de France, *Abnormal*, Foucault traces the emergence of a modern conception of monster and its transformation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represented by his study of "the individual to be corrected". This individual "opens the history of monstrosity on to the elaboration of a power that touches, heals, corrects the body by inhabiting it" as Amit Rai elaborates (Rai 542). Foucault gives an analysis of the monster as he reviews the history of abnormality. Foucault mentions the monster in his lectures and studies its role in defining the nature of every society.

The transition in understanding the nature of monsters as Foucault traces them genealogically ends with the shift in the studies of natural order at the end of the Eighteenth century. Moreover, it is important to trace his genealogy of the monster from the past to the present because as Gary Gutting assumes in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, the past provides knowledge "to understand something that is intolerable in the present" (Gutting 10). At the same time that work allows researchers to identify "the conditions of possibility and forms of social knowledge and practices" as Hunt and Wickman emphasize (cited in Sharpe 2010, 44). The emergence of a category of abnormal individuals in the modern age is associated with the abuse of power in different places of the world, according to Foucault "a technology of abnormal individuals appears precisely when a regular network of knowledge and power has been

established” (Foucault 61). Their production is a systematization and codification, the linking of power and knowledge, for Foucault this is based in three elements that include “natural history, pedagogical techniques, and the biology of sexuality” (Foucault 61).

Foucault focuses on the mechanisms of power that produce monsters, he also defines the framework within which the monster can be found as politico-judiciary. As part of his interest in this particular category of the abnormal, he tries to criticize or even define the power of normalization (medical knowledge and juridical power): “The monster is a transgression of law, natural and social. It is out-law, in the sense that, bypassing the limit, it puts itself outside the space of law. And outside the confines of law, as is known, live the monsters.” (Foucault 63). He also notes that there should be “an interdiction of civil and religious or divine law” to produce them. That is not decided by deformity or disability because the monster is “casuistry that is introduced into law by the confusion of nature” (Foucault 64). Foucault excludes science and medical intervention from the procedure of producing or eliminating monsters, as Sharpe notes because, to Foucault, the process of producing monsters needs “breach of nature and breach of law” (Sharpe 2010, 36). A monster is no longer a deformed or a failed creation of nature, rather it is the deformation of the continuity of nature. In *The Order of Things* Foucault sees the monster as a contributor to “the order of things” in that “it no longer signals the point of rupture in the unity between nature/reason/law. It is no longer external to order, nature, knowledge and or power. It is malformation or degeneration that serves to explain the passage from one species to another” (Foucault 1966). He tries to show that there are more monstrosities “hidden behind little abnormalities, deviance and irregularities” (Foucault 56). He derives his analysis from the late eighteenth century that witnessed “the emergence of a kind of specific domain that will become the domain... of a monstrosity that does not produce its effects in nature and the confusion of

species, but in behavior itself” (Foucault 74). Sharpe elaborates based on that in his *Foucault’s Monster and the challenge of the Law*: “monstrosity is no longer understood as the visible manifestation of monstrousness. It is precisely this fact of invisibility, where monstrousness is not shown forth or demonstrated, that constitute the abnormal individual as a figure of modernity” (Sharpe 2010, 51). Sharpe assumes that Foucault in his attempts to trace the transformation of the monster to the present, notices the shift from irregular body to deviant soul, and “the change in the legal focus from the externality of the body, its materiality, to the interiority of the mind” in terms of “a process that develops between 1765 and 1820-30”, i.e. the times of transformation in “political-juridical powers” (Foucault 74). Today’s monster is the offspring of the abnormal under the effect of power changes. For Foucault, the monster is “the transgression of natural limits” (Sharpe 2007, 386) “the monster appears and functions precisely at the point where nature and law are joined” because the monster is a “juridico-natural complex” while deformity or disability will change the “natural order”, it doesn’t lead to the designation of monsters because “it has a place in civil or canon law. The disabled may not conform to nature, but the law in some way provides for him. Monstrosity, however, is the kind of irregularity that calls law into questions and disable it” (Sharpe 2007, 386). Though use in contemporary context, the word monster is used in contemporary contexts to refer to persons with deformity like Frankenstein’s creation, or power abusers like dictators. Monsters are the product of power abuse, and that their presence distills to the legality of everything else. Therefore, law is the definer of monsters, normal and abnormal. That takes us back to the point of excluding deformity from constituting monsters. Regular humans can be considered monsters based on their political status, their relation to the law and or juridical order.

Taking into consideration the previous analysis of the nature of monsters and their definition, their use lay heavily in literary and intellectual contexts. Because it seems that when nature stops producing monsters, literature takes the lead. Monster literature, in particular, handles the process and questions the legality of making monsters. Therefore, the next section is devoted to two texts in which the making of a monster is the matter of concern. Both texts carries the name Frankenstein as the title page. But the differences between the contents are really deep and vital to the constitution of each monster. While Doctor Victor Frankenstein acquires a good deal of knowledge that enables him to put a corpse together and bring it to life in 1818. Hadi, a filthy scavenger, also creates one in 2005, in Baghdad.

2.3 Frankenstein in Baghdad: A monster from contemporary Iraq

Some of the creatures that are produced as Foucault sees them as the result of “the confusion of nature” are going to be seen in this section. Frankenstein the creator and Frankenstein the creature are going to be intertwined to explore the differences between nineteenth century monster and today’s monster. Beginning with an outline of *Frankenstein*’s plot summary and highlighting the main events, similarities and differences in what concern the monster through the story of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*.

2.3.1 Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818)

Mary Shelley wrote this text in a contest with Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. She spends some night thinking of what is going to be the scariest story to win the contest. Trapped indoors in a rainy day in Lake Geneva, Shelley gets the inspiration for the story of creating a monster that will survive until this day.

This novel is framed by letters to Mrs. Saville, England, from Captain Robert Walton in the North Pole, during the 1700s. Walton is a sea captain, he is sailing with his crew to the north

pole when they saw Victor Frankenstein on dog sled. Frankenstein is weak and sick at that moment, so Walton rescues him, nurses him and helps him get back to life. During his, Frankenstein tells Walton the story of his life's adventures that end him up in this place.

Frankenstein starts with memories of early childhood of a beautiful place where he grows up with his parents. He is "by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counselors and syndics: and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation" (Shelley 14). He was the only child, until his parents first bring to their custody Elizabeth Lavenza "my more than sister, the beautiful and adored companion of all my occupations and my pleaser" (Shelley 17). Then they have a second and third sons. Still "no human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself" (Shelley 19). Since that time, at the age of seven, he shows interest in the "secrets of heaven and earth that [I] desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substances of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me" (ibid 19). His friends in his life journey is Henry Clerval, "a boy of singular talent and fancy".

Frankenstein develops an interest in natural philosophy, as he reads the work of Cornelius Agrippa, which is not his father's sort of reading. His father remarks that this book is "sad trash" without explaining why. That remark motivates Frankenstein to "procure the whole work of this author, and afterwards of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus". At the age of seventeen his parents plan to send him to Ingolstadt, but an illness invades the family leaving Elizabeth in severe illness and "in the greatest danger". His mother has to nurse her, in spite of all the family's requests to stop. Elizabeth is fully recovered, but his mother catches the fever with the worse symptoms and consequently dies. Before her death his mother asks Victor and Elizabeth to unite, and asks Elizabeth to take care of her family. This is the first death in the family, and it affects every member

deeply: “I need not describe the feelings of those, whose dearest ties are rent by the most irreparable evil; the void that presents itself to the soul; and the despair that it exhibited on the countenance” (Shelley 24)

Frankenstein has to leave and start a new life, away from all that grief. It is hard for him to leave alone, especially when he spent all his life with his family and friends. There the “Angel of destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father’s door-led me first to M. Krempe, professor of natural philosophy. This “uncouth” professor along with chemistry professor M. Waldman updates Frankenstein’s readings with a new list of modern philosophy and “particularly chemistry”. They also show him great admiration:

I am happy,’ said M. Waldman, ‘to have gained a disciple; and if your application equals your ability, I have no doubt of your success. Chemistry is that branch of natural philosophy in which the greatest improvements have been and may be made. . . If your wish is to become really a man of science and not merely a petty experimentalist, I should advise you to apply to every branch of natural philosophy, including mathematics. (Shelley 28-9)

This increases his interest in chemistry and natural philosophy, which he keeps as a secret from his father who does not appreciate such a study. After years of study, Frankenstein believes that he could begin “bestowing animation” and “prepare the frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibers, muscles and veins”. Despite his knowledge he doubts his ability, of whether to create a “being like myself, or of simpler organization; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man” (Shelley 32). Frankenstein intention is far from this experience, he wants to have creatures, “new species” of his own. Then, he will be able to “renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption” (ibid 32). Here Frankenstein mixes animals and humans remains to create this being. In this mixture of human and animals, arises then a transgression of nature, a thing that belongs to both worlds the human and animal. Frankenstein creates “a being of gigantic

stature; that is to say about eight feet in high and proportionably large” (ibid 32). This creation then is “fictitious or made in relation to living flesh” (Cohen 4). The moment the monster opens its eyes, Frankenstein escapes leaving it to find its way in this life.

2.3.2 Saadawi’s Frankenstein

That is how Frankenstein creates the monster in the nineteenth century in Europe. The process seems simpler in Baghdad of the twenty first century. On the contrary to Victor Frankenstein of Shelley’s text, Hadi of al-Saadawi is an old scavenger who used to make his living out of dealing with antiques. Furthermore, he respects death and despises the daily treatment of the human body in Iraq. When his friend, Nahem, dies in one of the daily terrorist attacks, the morgue officer asks him to “put a body together and carry it off” (Saadawi 22). The quest to put a body together is the product of the moment, it is not an invention of Hadi or Saadawi. Nahem died a painful and gruesome death, he died “from a car bomb that had exploded in front of the office of a religious party in Karrada, killing also some other passersby and Nahem’s horse. It had been hard to separate Nahem’s flesh from that of the horse” (Saadawi 20). Therefore, Nahem couldn’t receive a proper burial with all his body parts in a coffin. Nahem’s body has been destroyed in the explosions and his flesh is mixed with dirt and the flesh of his horse. Driven by grief and anger, Hadi becomes “aggressive. He swore and cursed and threw stones after the American Hummers or the vehicles of the police and the National Guard. He got into arguments with anyone who mentioned Nahem and what had happened to him” (Saadawi 23). He needed time before he returned back to his normal self. He considers the Americans and National Guards responsible for Nahem’s death. From that time on, the remains of the body parts scattered here and there become Hadi’s first priority. He questions the legality of putting a corpse together from assortment of unrecognizable body

remains. That scene lives in his mind and motivates him to start collecting the remains of the dead and stitch them into one body. Therefore, he starts collecting left-over limbs and organs before they rot in the street. He retells the account of this creation as a story to the visitors of the café, which is located in Al-Bataween region of Baghdad which represents the lower class of the Iraqi society. That café is famous so journalists and news reporters from over the globe visit to talk with average Iraqis and make documentaries. In spite of that, this neighborhood offers the perfect environment to create a monster. It is not like Ingolstadt's prosperous house where Victor Frankenstein secretly hid his creation. Ingolstadt is not al-Bataween of 2005 where one can find body parts almost everywhere.

The public, on the other hand, engages in Hadi's story for the sake of entertainment. They never trusted his ability to stitch a body together. He is there, near one of the explosions, Saadawi describes:

Hadi watched the scene with eagle eyes, looking for something in particular amid this binge of death and devastation. Once he was sure he had seen it (a body part), he threw his cigarette to the ground and rushed to grab it before a powerful jet of water could blast it down the storm drain. He wrapped it in his canvas sack, folded the sack under his arm, and left the scene... The explosion was horrible, Hadi runs to the rescue or to collect what is valuable to him, jewelry money or waste crashed into bodies of people who were escaping the blast. The smoke blew away his nose before reaching the scene, the smoke of plastic, car seats and human bodies were grilled together. A smell that You have never smelled in your life, and one that you will remember as long as you lived. ... He sat in one of the nearby shops and watched the ambulance's arrival and the firetrucks, and the police filled the place. He was looking for a particular thing in this destruction. When he sees it, he runs to grab it before water flashes it to the drainage, he clutched it, hide it in a canvas put it under his arm and left quickly (Saadawi 27-9).

That is exactly how Hadi collects the body parts of his figure. He believes that he can save some flesh from such places, and that causes him to rush. There are enough people to help the living, but very few who cares for the remains of the dead. He smells the burning flesh and the

smoke of burning living humans, but he can't help them. He is going to rescue the dead as he believes that if he could stitch the remains into one body, then he will give it to the hospital to bury it as one:

The nose was all the corpse needed to be complete, so now Hadi was finishing the job. It was a horrible job, one he had done without anyone's help, and somehow it didn't seem to make any sense despite all the arguments he used when trying to explain himself to his listeners. "I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department, because it was a complete corpse that had been left in the streets like trash. It's a human being, guys, a person," he told them. "But it wasn't a complete corpse. You made it complete," someone objected. (Saadawi 26)

Now his mission is completed by rescuing the forgotten parts but he is not sure of his ability to carry it on. His motives and enthusiasm towards the remains of the body parts isn't convincing. He creates a whole body instead of burying the remains whenever he sees them. The body itself doesn't look like any other corpses, it shows how ugly death can be. What Hadi made is a stitched up scary body that he himself is scared to look at. He thinks of handing it to the forensic department because it is one body, of different body parts (only he knows that). He also considers taking "it out one night and leave it in some square or on the street and let the police come and finish the job?" (Saddawi 30). He believes that he has accomplished the mission he sets for himself, and now he is going to leave it to someone else. But who is going to accept such a corpse:

a dead body of a naked man, dripping from some parts of his wounded body sticky liquids. There were only a few drops of blood, dried on the arms and legs, and some blue bruises around the neck and shoulders. The body of the corpse was not clear or even unified. Hadi sat near the head, the position of the nose was completely distorted, as if a wild animal had eaten it. The nose was missing. Hadi opened the canvas, took that thing out, that he was looking for days ago, and still afraid of facing it. Hadi pulled out a fresh nose, the blood was still on it, with shaking hands he put it in place at the corpse face, and looked as if it is in its position as if it is related to this body and now it is back to its place. . . he wasn't satisfied with the final look, but at least he had accomplished his mission. (Saadawi 34)

After collecting all the parts Hadi places the nose to have a completed human body. Hadi is not a doctor, but a gossipy antique dealer “with bulging eyes, who reeked of alcohol and whose tattered clothes were dotted with cigarette burns”. He is not trying to create a living monster or giving life to a body. Instead, he is collecting the forgotten body parts to: “give it to the hospital as a complete body, this is a perfect body, was left in the street and was treated like rubbish. It is human, human oh people” (Ibid 34). It is a human, not a “new species” like that of Frankenstein centuries ago, because all the component parts are of humans.

Hadi calls the body “Whatitsname”, an empty name that means nothing in the Iraqi traditions and it is used in order to avoid using the word corpse or body in front of his audience. Hadi’s choice to name this corpse is also a way to hide his crime of creating a soon-to-be monster, and that all his endeavors rest in putting the remains together in one pile. Hadi gives it a name for the sake of reference and publicity, which is missing in Shelly’s book. Victor Frankenstein hides “a being of gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large” from even his best friend (Shelley 32). He also refuses to give it a name, because he escapes the moment its figure comes to life. When the figure receives the soul, and opens its eyes Frankenstein realizes the seriousness of this moment. He escapes right away leaving its creature to decide its future.

Meanwhile, Hadi goes for his night shift of collecting empty cans or meeting antique sellers, leaving the body of its creation in his shed. His feet drive him to a road where he is going to face death one more time. On the other end of the road there stands Hasib, a security guard at the Novotel hotel, seeing Hadi treasuring cans but he wanders off his security booth and is confronted by a rubbish truck driving at high speed towards the hotel gate:

When Hasib saw the rubbish truck, many possible explanations flooded his mind. It was just a rubbish truck. The driver had made a mistake –he had lost

control and veered off towards the hotel gate. There had been a traffic accident, and the driver had sped off and was unintentionally heading for the gate. No, it was a suicide bomber. Stop! Stop! One shot, then another. He didn't mean to kill the driver. He wouldn't dare kill anyone, but this was his duty. He was well aware of the strict orders about protecting the hotel. There were security companies and important people and maybe Americans in it. (Saadawi 36)

Hasib is supposed to be guarding the hotel, with the attendant duty inspect every vehicle and human coming close to him. He never thinks that this truck is full of explosives and is targeting the hotel. He shouts to the driver to stop, and shoots him but it is too late. The driver is a suicidal terrorist who will never stop and even after his death manages somehow to accomplish his mission. Hasib's body has disappeared leaving nothing for Hadi to collect, or for his family to bury. His family needs to bury him despite the empty coffin so "they put his burned black shoes; his shredded, bloodstained clothes; and small charred parts of his body. There was little left of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar; the coffin that was taken to the cemetery in Najaf was more of a token" (Saadawi 35). His soul, is still in the living's world roaming the streets looking for its body, it moves from one place to another when finally it visits the cemetery. There it finds a soul of a boy who asks Hasib to find his body or another body instead of staying like this.

"Why are you here?" the boy asked. "You should stay close to your body."

"It's disappeared."

"How did it disappear? You have to find it, or some other body, or else things will end badly for you."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know, but it always ends badly that way."

"Why are you here?"

"This is my grave. My body's lying underneath. In a few days I won't be able to get out like this. My body's decomposing, and I'll be imprisoned in the grave till the end of time." (Saadawi 38)

At that moment Hasib feels confused and scared, he sees his grave but he doesn't find his body. Therefore, he decides to return home, all his family members are sleeping. He walks up to the hotel

and finds nothing. In this roaming journey over the places he witnesses a body laying down. He desperately animates the body of Whatsitsname in a fabulous cinematic scene:

He felt he was caught in a vicious cycle. In a house in al-Bataween he saw a naked man asleep. He went up to him and checked to see if he was dead. It wasn't anyone in particular; the man looked strange and horrible. . . . With his hand, which was made of primordial matter, he touched the pale, naked body and saw his spirit sink into it. His whole arm sank in, then his head and the rest of his body. Overwhelmed by a heaviness and torpor, he lodged inside the corpse, filling it from head to toe, because probably, he realized then, it didn't have a soul, while he was a soul without a body. (Saadawi 39-40)

This soul is not the product of some scientific experiment like that of Frankenstein's creation. The soul of Hasib is aware of what happened to its body. Then it melts in the created body and goes on to develop a unity with it. The stitched up body is alive now as Hasib's soul is controlling it, and it has the desire to continue on living instead of remaining inanimate in Hadi's shed. Therefore, the body leaves Hadi and seeks comfort in Elishiva's house. Elishiva lives next to Hadi, she is a lonely Assyrian Christian widow. She has lost her family one after the other in different incidents. She is waiting for the fruit of her heart, Daniel, who died during the war with Iran, but she refused to admit this fact:

Nobody really listened to her when she spoke about the son she had lost twenty years ago, except for her daughters and Saint George the Martyr, whose soul she often prayed for and whom she saw as her patron saint. . . . Elishva was gradually losing people who had once supported her strange conviction that her son was still alive, even though he had a grave with an empty coffin in the cemetery of the Assyrian Church of the East. (Saadawi 7)

She didn't receive the body of her son, instead his father puts his guitar in the coffin and bury it. Her daughters are the only family member she has, but they fled the country after the outbreak of the 2003 war. They keep asking her to join them but she refuse to fellow or join them to Europe. She is still waiting for Daniel and has a strong belief that she will see him. That faith affects her relationship with her Muslim neighbors, who thinks she has some kind of mysterious

spiritual powers “Baraka”, and that “God’s hand was on her shoulder wherever she was” (Saadawi 9). Whether she possesses powers or not, she animates the corpse with the name she gives to him. She believes that he is her missing son, and he finds comfort and peace in her house.

Get up, Daniel,” Elishva shouted. “Get up, Danny. Come along, my boy.”
He stood up immediately. (Saadawi 53)

He is not Daniel, but that motivates the corpse to live. He is a person now, a body and a soul. She gives him recognition and makes him feel his presence is counted. This is not the case with Frankenstein’s creature who remains unfamiliar and with no acceptance from his creator and the world. Frankenstein’s creation begs the family whom he lives next to and supports them with food to accept him among them but they refuse. The Delacy family rejects the creation for his horrible figure, and William, Frankenstein’s little brother, tries to escape when he meets it. The creature couldn’t hurt the family but he vents all his anger on the little boy after realizing his connection to Frankenstein. The monster then realizes after killing the boy that even innocent creatures like William who was “unprejudiced, and have lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror deformity” (Shelley 102) runs away from him. Therefore, he decides that Frankenstein should taste his miseries.

When the Whatsitsname sees his face for the first time “He noticed the reflection of his own face in the glass. It rather surprised him—this was the first time he had recognized himself. He ran his finger over the stitches on his face and neck. He looked very ugly. How come the old woman didn’t seem startled by his dreadful appearance?” (Saadawi 55) His physical deformity is not of concern to her because “Not many people came back looking the same as when they left” (Saadawi 54). He spends the night at her house, and she was delighted. She talks to him, cooks for

him, and dresses him up in her sons clothes. Her conversation and care, not only animates him but also motivates him to live.

Different from Frankenstein's creature, who seeks human life and is asking for a partner from his creator "I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create" (Shelley 103-04). The Whatsitsname believes that he is made into this form for a reason, and that his mighty body has a job other than living with the old lady. He is mad and vengeful, he wants to avenge his body parts and all the figures behind this daily violent attacks. Thus he starts a mission of revenge first against some burglars in al-Bataween neighborhood. In a few days, the news of mysterious crimes reach Hadi, who is now convinced that he has created a monster. Some men approach Hadi and start an investigation on behalf of those stories. They are "from the Mukhabarat, or military intelligence or some other security agency, and the meeting would no doubt end in Hadi being arrested" and they run an investigation in the café where he convinces them that "The Whatsitsname has died" (Saadawi 84). Hadi is not sure yet that his Whatsitsname is the one they are looking for, because he has not seen the Whatsitsname since his disappearance. The news states that the Whatsitsname, a figure of scary face is killing bad guys and spreading fear and terror in Baghdad. Then one night the Whatsitsname appears in front of Hadi alive and real:

The first sentence the Whatsitsname spoke confirmed Hadi's fears: he really was visiting him that night in order to kill him. "You're responsible for the death of the guard at the hotel, Hasib Mohamed Jaafar," the Whatsitsname said. "If you hadn't been walking past the hotel—the guard wouldn't have come out to the gate. He might have stayed close to the sentry box, which was relatively far from the outer gate, and from a distance opened fire on the suicide bomber driving the garbage truck. The explosion might have caused him some injuries, or the blast might have thrown him, but he definitely wouldn't have died, and the next

morning he could have gone home to his wife and his little daughter. Saadawi 127)

The Whatsitsname seems to blame Hadi for the death of Hasib, not for making him. He seems upset and is trying to kill his creator from the first encounter. Hadi tries to defend himself as his father or creator. The Whatsitsname replies: “You were just a conduit, Hadi,”. . . You’re just an instrument, or a surgical glove that Fate put on it hand to move pawns on the chessboard of life” (Saadawi 128). But Hadi is lucky because the Whatsitsname is confused and that “the soul of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar was demanding revenge, and he had to kill the person who had caused Hasib’s death”. It is still not Hadi’s fault, but the Whatsitsname’s goal is to avenge the soul to “find rest”. Hadi finds a way out to save his life and blame the terrorists “It was the Sudanese suicide bomber who caused his death,”. The bomber died as well, and that confused the Whatsitsname even more “How can I kill someone who’s already dead?” therefore he decides on continuing his mission which is different from that of Frankenstein’s creation. If the Whatsitsname believes that he is alive to avenge those who made his body parts, Frankenstein’s creation is looking for a human’s life and rights. The latter wants to live in peace with a mate similar to him away from the cruelty of the human’s communities, but he still needs the help of his creator: “you must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede” (Shelley 104). Frankenstein shows no sympathy to the miserable life of the work of his hands, he ignores all his creature’s speech and wishes for a mate. In so many places in the book, the wretch requests for a mate for him. Unlike the Whatshisname, Shelley’s creature doesn’t need new body parts every time, all it needs is a female of same creation that they can live together far from the world of man “I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself; the

gratification is small, but it is all that I can receive, and it shall content me. It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless and free from the misery I now feel (Shelley 105). That is the reason of its visit and the goal for the rest of his life. It keeps chasing its creator seeking sympathy, when nothing is granted it starts to seek revenge.

The Whatsitsname, on the other hand, manages to live far from Hadi, especially when he finds people who believe in his power and that he is the one, an Iraqi citizen. Those people provide shelter and body parts to the Whatsitsname, they also believe in him and consider him the savior of Iraq, the best match for Iraqi crisis that is made of all the Iraqi nationalities. Simultaneously, his confusion grows more when he finds that “each piece of dead flesh that made up his body fell off if he didn’t avenge the person it came from within a certain amount of time. But if he did avenge someone, then that person’s piece would fall off anyway, as if it was no longer needed” (ibid 134). To survive the Whatsitsname needs new body parts, and that means he needs help. Hadi shows support out of terror with a hidden desire to get rid of his creation:

He told the Whatsitsname he was prepared to help in any way he wanted. The Whatsitsname said he needed to replace the parts that were falling off, so he needed new flesh from new victims. Hadi said he would try to help, starting the next day, but in fact he had other ideas. It would be good, he thought, if the Whatsitsname’s body fell to pieces quickly so that he could be done with him and with the terror he inspired. (Saadawi 135)

The contemporary monster ignores the human’s life because he believes he is not a normal being he is superior. Thus, he attempts to bring forth justice starting by chasing terrorists who cause the daily attacks, then some old Ba’athist who were responsible for sending young men to war including Elshiva’s son Daneil. In spite of his intent to avenge the innocents, the living “have been giving me a bad reputation. They’re accusing me of committing crimes, but what they don’t understand is that I’m the only justice there is in this country.” The Whatsitsname is a monster of

the age of media and social communication, so Hadi asks him to make an interview: “An interview? I’m telling you I don’t want to draw attention to myself, and you suggest an interview with the press!” Then Hadi comforts him: “You’ve already drawn attention to yourself,” “You should defend yourself, to win some friends to help you in your mission. Right now, you’re everyone’s enemy” (Saadawi 135). The Whatsitsname takes the recorder as he will interview himself, and sets forth to peruse his mission. He is not afraid of him being rejected or neglected, instead, wherever he goes he finds company and never needed Hadi again.

The text presents opposites in a conjoined mode which emphasizes the collapse the Iraqi society suffered after the invasion. Two contradictory sets of characters appear in this text: the neighbors Hadi and Elishiva on the one hand and the journalist Mahmoud al-Sawadi and Brigadier Majid, the head of a top-secret agency, on the other. The stories of those opposites intertwine in one way or another with the Whatsitsname’s journey. As the Whatsitsname roams Baghdad’s streets pictures of the city’s great past mix with blood and dirt of the bleak present. Hadi and Elsihiva are two different characters but both help making and raising up the Whatsitsname, each in their part. Then al-Sawadi and Brigadier Majid, who increases the Whatsitsname’s ambition and desire to start his mission. Hadi’s sitting in the café daily is beneficial because it is the place that gives him the chance to aspire in the world of his imagination. It is the place where he is not the junk dealer, who listens to peoples’ offers and accept them grudgingly, but there he is the speaker. There, he tells stories of his daily encounter with death, and of the Whatsitsname to tourists, journalists and residents, among them is Mahmoud al-Sawadi. Al-Sawadi is a journalist who came from the city of Amara to Baghdad escaping from his destiny. He visits places where he can meet local people and perhaps get a scoop. The first time he saw Hadi, he was accompanied by a German journalist who is making a documentary about Baghdad. Hadi’s story sends her back to the hotel

because as she claims, it is stolen from Robert De Niro's movie. He never trusted Hadi's ability to stitch a body together, or even able to collect remains from the streets. In spite of that, he gives Hadi a digital tape recorder to record an interview with the creature. Mahmoud "had visions of the junk dealer selling the recorder in the Harj market in Bab al-Sharqi. But ten days later Hadi belied Mahmoud's doubts by giving the recorder back to him. All the justifications and motifs behind the Whatsitsname's moves and actions are recorded, listening to them al-Sawadi, he "couldn't get over the shock of the story or the soft, calm voice in which it had been recounted. He opened the laptop the editor had given him and copied the audio files from the digital recorder." This creature is real, and now al-Sawadi is going to achieve his goal. Unfortunately, he is arrested or has been taken to an interrogation by Brigadier Majid's men.

Brigadier Sorour Mohamed is the director general of the Tracking and Pursuit Department. Al-Sawadi wonders tracking and pursuit of what? Majid was a colonel in the intelligence service of the old Iraqi army, and now is the head of another institution that use violence to investigate and interrogate people. His institution is found by the American force and:

Its mission was to monitor unusual crimes, urban legends, and superstitious rumors that arose around specific incidents, and then to find out what really happened and, more important, to make predictions about crimes that would take place in the future: car bombings and assassinations of officials and other important people. (ibid 75)

In his investigations to such crimes Brigadier Majid depends on different informative sources to get what he wants, among those is a group of soothsayers and astrologers "some of my soothsayers are talking about a real war within the next six or seven months" (Ibid 77). He depends mostly on their information to find the places of terrorists' attacks or cars' bombs. Unfortunately, all their news seem to create more chaotic and terrifying incidents because they are either late or inaccurate just like the incidents of the Imams Bridge. Where Brigadier Majid receives the news of people

gathering to cross the bridge at the time “the big television screen in his grand office flashed breaking news that dozens of people had been killed on the Imams Bridge” (Ibid 110). He receives reports about the criminal who doesn’t die “from various parts of Baghdad. The bullet goes into the criminal’s head or body, but he just keeps walking and doesn’t bleed”(Ibid 78). The one to blame is “the one who has no name” as one of his astrologers tells him. He then sets his mission targeting this figure. He reads al-Sawadi’s article about the story of the Whatsitsname and from that article he knows what is missing, he gets Hadi’s address from al-Sawadi, who in his side tries to clear the way and escape that terrifying place. He thinks of Criminal X, or the nameless monster as the media calls the Whatsitsname and all he concludes is “If bullets really don’t kill him and he knows we’re trying to track him down, what if he followed us, found our headquarters, and then came here to wipe us all out?” (Ibid 211). This circle of accusation will never end, and brigadier Majid will keep thinking of the Whatsitsname but will never catch him.

Meanwhile the Whatsitsname is far from Brigadier Majid and his office. What is once made of the limbs of blown off bodies turns into a blower himself, the Whatsitsname has turned into a killing machine. The Whatsitsname stops visiting Hadi when he develops a relationship with a group of outlaws that includes “three madmen, a magician and a Sophist” who are ready to sacrifice themselves for his own survival. They help him and provide him with a shelter and to each one of them, he is a representative of justice. Not only that, they dress him up and hide his scars with makeup and give him information about his new enemy “I’m getting close to accomplishing my mission. There’s a man from al-Qaeda living in a house in Abu Ghraib, on the edges of the capital, and a Venezuelan officer who’s a mercenary with a security company operating in Baghdad. Once I’ve taken revenge on them, everything will be over” (Ibid 148). They increase his ambition and agitate his feelings towards those groups of terrorists and in that they

increase the daily violence in the Iraqi street. He always says that every step he takes brings him closer to achieve his revenge: “Except that things haven’t been moving to a close in the way I had assumed they would.” There is a consequence in every move he is taking, still he is taking it:

One night I went home with my whole body riddled with bullets. It had been a fierce battle and a perilous chase, and I only just managed to get my hands around the neck of my target, a criminal who was supplying many of the armed gangs with dynamite and other explosives regardless of their ideological or political background. He was a merchant of death par excellence and was living with some other members of his gang in a house close to the Shorja market in central Baghdad. “The three madmen extracted many of the bullets from my body. The Magician and the Sophist helped by trying to sew up the parts that were damaged. A piece of flesh on my shoulder wouldn’t stay in place—it was all runny, like flesh from a several days-old corpse .(Saadawi 149)

He returns to his assistants to help him, clean his body from bullets and replace his falling body parts as they are being avenged. “When I got up the next day, I found that many parts of my body were on the ground, and there was a strong smell of rot. None of my assistants was nearby—they’d gone up to the roof to escape the smell.” (Ibid 149). Innocents are also victims of his mission and use of power. He believes that they must sacrifice themselves for him, and his assistants convince him to believe this. One time, when he feels his eyes are lost and barely been able to hold them in their place with glasses, he remembered the madman’s speech. That moment he authorizes himself to replace them as soon as possible, and an innocent old man is there for him:

I fired one round from my revolver, just as I began to lose all sensation in my eye. I heard nothing after that—the shelling by the rival groups had stopped, and there were no footsteps or crying or even the sound of breathing. Now blind, I took some cautious steps forward until my shoe hit something. Bending down, I felt around for the warm body of the frightened old man. The bullet had hit him right in the skull. He had been expecting death to come from the upper floors of the buildings or from the ends of the streets in front of him, but it had come from behind. “I took out a little knife and did my work quickly. What would the Magician say now? These are eyes from the body of an innocent victim. The proportion of criminal parts in my body wouldn’t increase. But what should I tell him? In retribution for this victim, who should I exact vengeance on? (ibid 150)

He feels that he should live to avenge, and to avenge he needs new parts and new victims. If none of his assistants is around, everyone else should help and sacrifice their parts for him. His action is supported by his philosophy of survival that is supported by his dogmatic belief in his mission:

I managed to install my new eyes and could see again. Seeing the body of the innocent old man, I had an idea and I clung to it—it looked like the truth I had been seeking. The old man was a sacrificial lamb that the Lord had placed in my path. He was the Innocent Man Who Will Die Tonight. So that was that. He had been going to die in a few minutes, or within half an hour at the most. (ibid 150)

If the Whatsitsname's mission is based on revenge from all the terrorists and criminals who are killing those innocent people, then whom he is going to avenge this old man whom he has just killed? He believes that such sacrifices are needed in these circumstances, because it is a war and especially in a war like this, nobody is just a victim or just a criminal. Everyone is a bit of one and a little bit of the other: "who among us is not part evil?" That is his part of the story, as it is going to end with him being the avenger of all the innocents and none can capture him even Brigadier Majid.

2.4 The role of the monster and its nature in the contemporary Iraqi texts

The different political, national and social changes in Iraq post 2003 not only created monsters but confused writers and theorists as to define them. Saadawi goes over some of those changes in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. He initially seems to mock the moral absolutism that divides people in black/white, Shi'i/Sunni and or Arab/Kurds. For him the body is one, despite the different entities that constitute it, the body couldn't act without them all working together. Additionally, he examines different aspects of a society that enables its people to create monsters as he follows

the journey of its creation. Therefore, the text looks at the nature of people living in Baghdad and how they interact with each other after the creation of the Whatsitsname, and how this creature symbolizes the contextualized people. As mentioned above that the monster in Frankenstein in Baghdad is made of human body parts, and his creator says it is human. His creator collects forgotten and leftover body parts in different places of Iraq, and didn't mix them with animals limbs.

That is a point of concern since the contemporary Iraqi state is religiously, nationally and culturally heterogeneous. Religiously speaking, Iraq is a Muslim country with both Shi's and Sunnis as representatives of that, but there are other minorities like Christians, Jews, Assyrians, and atheists within its population. Nationally speaking, Iraq is Arabic, and shares its north side with the Kurds. The people there have lived together deep into recorded history, and recently speaking as one nation for thirty-five years under the reign of the Ba'athists. That is until the 2003 War that the united nation started to suffer. Although the 2003 Invasion freed the country from the dictatorship of the Ba'athist, it cleared the space for all the politically oppressed components to establish the new Iraqi state. Factions reached for power in different directions, and the country woke up to daily fights within its people. This created space for terrorist, jihadist and sectarian war that took the lives of thousands of Iraqis. The new government as we see in the text depends on people like brigadier Majid to control the situation. Brigadier Majid on his turn uses soothsayers to help him carry his mission. Law is confused and the Iraqi citizen lives with the daily blasts knowing that no one is going to help him. There is law but one unable to stop the cars from exploding or suicidal bombers from shattering their flesh and others in public places.

Therefore, when Hadi sees body parts here and there he decides on stitching them up in one body to bury it. He tries to bury Iraq, or the one that used to be a united nation. That stitched

up body reanimates and becomes the new monster that is at the borders “where nature and law are joined”. Though it is created inside the society and from the Iraqis themselves, the monster is considered as an outlaw. That is because he tries to avenge the corrupt government, the heartless terrorist and the abuse of power. That shows deformity in the social and political figures of Iraq. The monster here is not “limited to transgressing to a limit (of nature). That which is constituted as monster, and that one would want to consign, through its inclusion in the discourse, to outside space, constitutes nevertheless excess, a residue not reducible to the logic of identity and difference” (Nuzzo 67). This monster is the one who belongs to the poor and defends the unarmed civilians. He is created inside the society, the issue of the identity is already solved, he is the Iraqi ideal citizen. He has a mission and his existence is meaningful, and then after achieving his mission, he “will disappear” (Saadawi 146). This creature’s multi-identifications give him different names and qualities: he is criminal X to the police, The One Who Has No Name to Bridger Majid, most often as the Whatsitsname to Hadi, and the one or Savior to the civilians.

He emerges when power is being abused by different parts, and tries to save the day. Foucault stresses that in such cases new abnormalities appear “when a regular network of knowledge and power has been established” (Foucault 61). He is a combination of law, nature and knowledge. Therefore he feels stronger and after figuring out that he is the perfect combination on the national level, he declares himself the ideal citizen, that he is the law. At this point we need to remember that Foucault mentions that “The monster is a transgression of law, natural and social. It is out-law, in the sense that, bypassing the limit, it puts itself outside the space of law. And outside the confines of law, as is known, live the monsters” (Foucault 63). By putting himself outside the law the monster comes to represent the different ideologies that come to appear as the face of Iraq after the invasion.

Saadawi believes that the process of patchworking body parts into one entity allegorizes the reassembly of the post-invasion Iraq. His use of different tones in the texts makes it readable in spite of “the heavy subject matter” as Ian Mode states, he goes further to say that:

He (Saadawi) never allows us to forget the human toll, the senseless death, torture, and misery, but he also has fun at the expense of those in power, especially the ridiculous, Monty Python-esque Tracking and Pursuit Department. There are some laugh-out-loud moments as the junior astrologer embarks on a Machiavellian plan to overthrow the senior astrologer (with the help of a certain patchwork cadaver). Less successful is Saadawi’s effort to inject ambiguity into the narrative, suggesting that Whatshisname is a rumor, a myth, a figment of the imagination. The symbolism of Whatsitsname is strong enough without muddying the waters.

Along with the ambiguity of the monster and its nature and presences we see stories of a corrupted government that outlives its citizens, a splintered nation with civilians grappling with daily life with pain and terror. The book also refers to the absurdity of the human loss and causalities of the various daily violent actions. The book is structured almost like Shelley’s *Frankenstein* with a plot that contains many stories within it. The author follows a few individuals as their lives intersect, thanks to the monster, who was reanimated by the ghost of a security guard killed in a suicide bombing. The cars’ explosions supply Hadi with the missing limbs for his perfect dead corpse, and gives Elishva, the elderly Christian woman the chance to see her dead son, and Mohamoud, the journalist, the scoop to shine in the world of the press. All those stories are caught up with the journey of the Whatsitsname to lead the country to a better life. The Whatsitsname believes that: “Because I’m made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds—ethnicities, tribes, races, and social classes—I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I’m the first true Iraqi citizen, he thinks.” Iraq’s different parts are stitched up together with blood and dirt as one nation under the imperative soul that controls them for so long. At this point, Saadawi resembles the invasion to the entering of the soul into the Whatsitsname’s

body. Just like the Whatsitsname raising again from death with a heterogeneous body, the Iraqi cities are trying to stand up in spite of all the falling parts. This body that came back to life is not like the one that died, it's a heterogeneous patchwork creature, and that heterogeneity empowers it to survive and carry out a mission. Iraq's heterogeneity is also part of its power and the attempts to separate its components end up with disasters. The text unfolds the incidents of the "Imams Bridge, which crosses the river of Tigris between the district of Kadhimiya (a Shi'i district) and Adimiya (a Sunni one)" (Saadawi 110). Thousands of Shias are crossing the bridge to the Kadhimiya to celebrate the anniversary death of one of their Imams Musa al Khadim. The Sunnis are helping them and supporting their needs. An image of harmony is reflected in this scene, while it is recorded in the text from Bridger Majid's office and his astrologers. That unity will not last long, as "a rumor that there was a suicide bomber among the pilgrims had caused panic, and some of the pilgrims were trampled to death while others threw themselves in the river and drowned" (Saadawi 110-111). The unity of the nation is always interrupted in this scene as in many real scenes from daily life. Saadawi tries to emphasize this point through the struggle of the Whatsitsname to survive. It is not easy to survive in Iraq unless you are sempiternal, or being an eternal patchwork like the Whatsitsname.

Shelley's book frames the monster as outside the "neighborhood of man." As we walk with the creature across the mountains and forests we see and encounter different cases of social segregation. Even though the De Lacy family are refugees, they are never represented as outside of humanity. By creating the monster, Frankenstein creates an irreconcilable division, a new creation that is different "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, . . . his shrivelled complexion

and straight black lips” (Shelley 35). This creature could not be human and will not belong to the human’s nation regardless of all the knowledge it acquires because it is a different race, “a race of devils”. Even in unequal society of the exiled it doesn’t fit, as Moretti illustrates the hierarchy of society with the presence of the monster: “But the monster also makes us realize that in an unequal society they are not equal. Not because they belong to different ‘races’ but because inequality really does score itself into one’s skin, one’s eyes and one’s body” (Moretti: 70). The creation doesn’t divide the society as much it shows the weakness that Frankenstein tends to ignore. Frankenstein treats his creature with denial first, abandonment and then attempts to kill it. Frankenstein’s fear of the growth of this race and the danger that accompanied it increased his desire to eliminate it. The only request of the creature is to have a mate and that costs him his creator’s life.

The Whatsitsname is here for a reason, he never considers himself a product of a chance or a scientific invention. His appearance in this particular time and place challenges all the attempts of the government and their claims of making peace. He is there, created in the middle of Baghdad in al Bataween, in the daylight, by a junk dealer. Al-Bataween is a forgotten region in Baghdad, which I believe, is in itself a key character in the novel. Saadawi tries to show the effect of this society, which seems marginal, not influential to the events of the story. On the contrary, to our view it seems influential in its fingerprint and its habituation of what is happening. It is the wall, which receives the pain of terrorism and tragedies. The wall that is climbed by the infiltrators to this society in their journey to the chairs of Parliament. Indeed, this miserable community is the right environment to create the Whatsitsname. It is neglected, ignored and full of simple Iraqis that represent the majority of the nation. To this group of people the government address their speeches

and give promises of a better life. Unfortunately, all they can see is more terrorist attacks and more Mukhabarat investigators and more death.

Therefore, the Whatsitsname simply represents the unfulfilled promises of the political system and the spiraling of death throughout the country is seeing. He is both one of the Iraqi citizen and all of them, and any attempt to categorize him is to categorize the Iraqis themselves. Still, all they know about him is that he is scary to look at, and that narrows their viewpoints to suspicion. While he could be a representative of the government by being above the law and that his appearance is the least of concern to his followers. Nuzzo believes that “the body of the monster always exceeding the discursive forms of its conceptualization” (Nuzzo 57). He is aware of his look, but that doesn’t imprison him in the category of horrifying, or excluded. He insisted on being there, in the middle of the struggle believing that he can solve it. In that he represents the political terror come to life, any attempt to exclude it will fail. He chooses to stand up with the innocents, hunt them and protect them at the same time. He excludes the government from his world and starts targeting them. Sam Metz believes that Saadawi uses his “Frankenstein to disrupt conventional understandings and reveal all the present-day, real horrors that the United States’ shock-and-awe democracy-building helped bring to Baghdad. He provides less of a balm for our crazy times and more of a cattle prod for action”. Metz and some other critics, believe in Saadawi’s intention to mock both the Iraqi government that is chosen by the Coalition and the Coalition for their crimes in the country. The story doesn’t end there, it starts there in that chaotic environment among those neglected and devastated civilians. It starts there because the monster is a creation of power’s abuse, he is the deformation of the continuity of nature: “[monsters] contribute to the order of things. . . It no longer signals the point of rupture in the unity between nature/reason/law. It is no longer external to order, nature, knowledge, power. It is malformation or degenerate on that

serves to explain the passage from one species to another” (Nuzzo 63). The daily stories of horror, brutality, terrorist attacks, political unrest and the untimely bombings give birth to him. This creation motivates the essence of fear to control the life of Iraqis. While Foucault believes that the monster is an “amalgam of two forms of normative judgment, the medical and the legal” (Sharpe 387). The Whatsitsname is a mixture of life and death, inside and outside, juridico and unjuridico, politics and civilian. The morphological regulation of the Whatsitsname determine the level of his monstrosity. He is regulated by chaos and is the product of pain and terror. He is constituted at the moment when others body parts are being amputated illegally, and so many representatives to be blamed for that illegality. His formation into one body is also politically and even medically illegal. Those parts belong to different bodies and should go with their bodies in this life or into the next. Instead, a defect in the political system unleashes monsters that hunt people’s lives.

The presence of the monster signals a crisis, he “shows a fracture within a certain type of order, and constitute a principle of intelligibility” (Nuzzo 62). When the war against the Americans turns into a war between Iraqis themselves, its damage had affected the value of the human being. Terrorists reach every corner and target the most crowded places to achieve their revenge, depriving people of their right to live. The crisis is when “life and death reach a level of non-distinction” (Nuzzo 58) because everybody is killing everybody. Life, in Iraq, lost its value, and death is at the corner, and the Iraqis’ fight against each other will not stop unless a mighty force stops it. At that moment of intersection between life and death, the monster is born. The monster is that reflective force; it is the mixture the people are waiting for, their savior, and a solution to the crisis. It shows the Iraqis what it needs to survive that sectarian war: a sacrifice. He becomes an object of sacrifice that “incarnates, paradoxically, a lack of differentiation, or better, it is that non-includable difference that threatens the capacity of knowledge and power to establish and

reproduce differences within a given order” (Nuzzo 58). They need to sacrifice their existence to his because he is ‘the first true Iraqi citizen’. Iraqis though, he is better than the enemy (collation force and the Iraqi militias) and they are ready to cooperate with the enemy in order to live in peace. Franco Moretti elaborates that collaboration as:

Fascinated by the horror of the monster, the public accepts the vices of its destroyer without a murmur, just as it accepts his literary depiction, the jaded and repetitive typology which regains its strength and its virginity on contact with the unknown. The monster, then, serves to displace the antagonisms and horrors evidenced within society to outside society itself (Moretti 68).

The text gives insights into the power of religious faith in a times of political, philosophical and maybe religious disorder; alongside hints on self-deception, in which everyone is involved in the war. The relationship between the Whatsitsname and the civilians explains the depth of those insights. Hatred is the first reaction to the Whatistname’s existence. Then, in spite of participating in the continuous circle of deaths, Whatitsname becomes famous and is identified with many heroes for the different sects of Iraqis. One of his followers tells him and assures to him that he is: “an instrument of mass destruction that presages the coming of the savior that all the world’s religions have predicted. I’m the one who will annihilate people who have lost their way and gone astray. By helping me in my mission, he is accelerating the arrival of the long-awaited savior.” His deformed appearance is more acceptable than the beauty of the people in government. For the Shi’a, he is the one, for the Sunni, he is the one. People’s pain mixed with their desire for salvation, and its appearance motivate them to support him as their One because he addresses their needs:

With the help of God and of heaven, I will take revenge on all the criminals. I will finally bring about justice on earth, and there will no longer be a need to wait in agony for justice to come, in heaven or after death. Will I fulfill my mission? I don’t know, but I will at least try to set an example of vengeance—the vengeance of the innocent who have no protection other than the tremors of their souls as they pray to ward off death. (Saadawi 143)

From his part, the Whatsitsname believes in people's support and that "I am loyal, expected, loved and hoped for" (ibid 156). His supporters are ready to sacrifice their own flesh so he could live forever. This support increased his pride and his desire to continue his mission; a mission that is based on revenge. Once justice is achieved by killing some of the different militias representatives or participants who are responsible for creating him, he will start killing for his own survival. He abandons Hadi, his creator, unlike Frankenstein's monster who keeps chasing its creator till his death. This is possibly because the monster in this text is acceptable to the public who appreciates him and supports his needs.

While in Shelley's text the monster escapes every time it encounters people, because of their response to its physical appearances which varies from innocent cries to harmful reaction:

One of the best of these I entered; but I had hardly placed my foot within the door before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel, quite bare, and making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had beheld in the village. (Shelley 108-9)

Nothing in the Whatsitsname is lasting, except for the desire to continue living. He does not want to decompose and become extinct. To do that he has to start to execute at such a speed because he needs to win his first battle against time. He kills those who killed his donors, and here, he turns from a representative of the nation to that of the state. He clings to life, perhaps more than those who gave him their lives, and pieces of their bodies. He owns a mighty body, and his soul has the desire to stay in this world. The Whatsitsname justifies his actions as those for the sake of the nation, and hates to be misunderstood:

What's worse is that people have been giving me a bad reputation. They're accusing me of committing crimes, but what they don't understand is that I'm the only justice in this country [...] Because I'm made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds — ethnicities, tribes, races, and social classes. [...] I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I'm the first true Iraqi citizen. (Saadawi 135)

This contemporary monster “is a metaphor both, for the physical horrors of Iraq, and for the development of groups within that chaos” (Times Literary Supplement). As representative of justice he turns into a killing machine and a representative of fear. People relate it to the nature of the sovereignty and that each powerful figure turns to eliminate people for the sake of its survival. To each nationality it is “blank slate” mainly an adaptation of people’s fear and pain: “a mishmash” fear of the Whatsitsname continues to spread. In Sadr City they speak of him as a Wahhabi, in Adamiya as a Shiite extremist. The Iraqi government describes him as an agent of foreign powers, while the spokesman for the U.S. State Department says it “was an ingenious man whose aim was to undermine the American project in Iraq” (ibid 268).

3. NIGHTMARE AND SLOW VIOLENCE INVADE THE LAND OF THE POMEGRANATE'S TREE IN SINAN ANTOON: *THE CORPSE WASHER* (2010)

“If death is a postman, then I receive his letters every day,” remarks Jawad. “I am the one who opens carefully the bloody and torn envelopes. I am the one who washes them, who removes the stamps of death and dries and perfumes them” (Antoon 3).

The Merriam Webster defines death as “a permanent cessation of all vital (the end of life), the cause or occasion of loss of life, and the state of being no longer alive” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/death>) among many other definitions. All the definitions try to imply that death is the opposite of life, being dead meaning you are not a living person any more. Then death is a fact like life, both are mysterious and highly related to each other. The world of the dead is where those who are no longer alive and whose journey in the living world had ended. On the other hand, there is the world of the living whose inhabitants are still alive and have not yet faced death. Death, as the definition suggests, has many causes, reasons or even occasions, none of which are our concern here. What is concerning is the nature of death itself, and how it starts to abandon its world and try to control the world of the living, especially in today's Iraq.

In the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, death is everywhere. The battle field moved first into the streets and then into homes and even the lives of those who escaped it. The contemporary Iraqi scene shows how death is routinized and became a constitutive member of the daily news. Iraqis talk about death, live death, escape death and survive it every single day. Death is not only controlling the scene by the different forms it applies, but also traumatizing it because it is inevitable. Though death is not new to Iraqis, the changes in the political atmosphere in Iraq after 2003 changed the nature of death. During the previous century Iraq witnessed political unrest

as power transitioned from one government to another. It isn't until 1968 when Iraq finally formed a stable government. The Iraqi government of 1979-2003 was under the administration of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athists. Still, the new governmental stability didn't give security to the Iraqi citizenry or peace. The country and its army engaged in three wars. First a long and exhausting war of eight years with Iran from 1980-88. Then as the army was trying to recover, it was sent to occupy Kuwait in 1990. Impotent to conquer, Iraq lived a decade under economic embargo. An embargo that deprived the country of all the essential nutritional supplies necessary for daily life, including baby food. March of 2003 brought the American-led invasion to liberate the Iraqis and give them baby food and democracy and Pepsi cans and freedom all mixed up together and delivered to the country on the burning guns of the American tanks.

The new Iraqi government collaborated with the Coalition forces, and their role was limited to supporting the Americans. Unfortunately the Americans' dream didn't work in America, neither did it in Iraq and the recurrent change was not easy for most Iraqis. Iraq's politics is exactly in "the form of war", therefore the places of death and life are mixed up and the population experienced horrific death, daily blasts, and numerous terrorist attacks. Finally, that politics initiated a cycle of violence in the form of unceasing sectarian war. Estimates of the numbers of Iraqis killed as a result of the recent invasion and occupation ranges between "30,000, provided by former President Bush (who later conceded that it might be closer to 108,000 and counting as stated by the organization Iraqi Body Count), and more than 650,000, put forward in 2006 by the medical journal *Lancet*". The prestigious British medical journal used previously accepted methods for calculating death rates to estimate the number of "excess" Iraqi deaths after the 2003 invasion. Almost 92 percent of the dead, the study asserted, were killed by bullets, bombs, or US air strikes (Burnham, cited in Al Ali 29).

Subsequently, death's representation fascinated Iraqi writers for years, due to the nature of death as inescapable in everyday life. Writers see death's pervasiveness and controlling power, which has increased over the course of war. Writers then emphasize that by the end of such days the Iraqis are not going to see beautiful dream but nightmares. Additionally, living nightmares are going to accompany them into the daylight as well. Sinan Antoon is among the prominent Iraqi writers who sees in gothic fiction the best literary approach to demonstrate to the world the mayhem of the war. Antoon and his fellow writers try to literalize the grisly scenes which opened the door to a new stream of literary invention. It helps him express a genuine picture of the death and agony that Iraqis endure every day since 2003. In Antoon's 2010 novel *The Corpse Washer* nightmare and slow violence invade the land of the pomegranate's tree.

Iraq is a million broken mirrors scattered across a desert crushed by Rome's hooves. Blind barbarians must look for the pieces and wipe the blood off them without being devoured by the wolves, which howl and growl on both sides. Everything has changed now: The shoulder is a shelf for coffins. The eye a well of tears. The lung a valley for death. He must give the dead barbarians faces and names. And there are more every day. (Antoon, 2013, p. 33)

The Corpse Washer is the third novel for the Iraqi novelist, poet and essayist Sinan Antoon. It appeared first in Arabic as *The pomegranate's Alone* (or *Wahdaha Shajarat al-Roman*) in 2010, then he translated it into English. In *The Corpse Washer*, Antoon uses different images of verbal violence to express the depth of the sufferings of civilians and the true call for help. The suffering, as he suggests, is not the product of this particular moment, instead it is the accumulations of previous decades. Through the use of gothic fiction in *The Corpse Washer*, Antoon deploys a frank treatment of the reality and the annihilation of the human soul using images of daily violence on corpses.

Antoon left Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, then revisited the country after 2003. He is among the few exiled writers who were against the decision of the American-led war against Iraq in 2003. War, for him, brings more destruction than any promised peace. When he was asked about what he saw in Iraq, Antoon said: “now we had entered the stage of total destruction to erase Iraq once and for all” (Antoon, 2014, p. 85). His reaction to that visit came in many literary, fictional and non-fictional writings including *The Corpse Washer*, which shows the real face of war. The text was longlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize 2014 and won the 2014 Arab American Book Award given by the Arab American National Museum.

Like Saadawi, and other contemporary Iraqi writers, Antoon frankly treats the Iraqi scene after and before the American-led invasion in 2003. He emphasizes different forms of violence and especially the political violence. Here in this text, Antoon puts the reader face to face with death through a daily treatment of corpses. But unlike Hadi, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, who respects and pities the remains of human flesh, and attempts to bury them. Antoon’s protagonist, Jawad, rejects the daily encounter with corpses through his profession as a corpse washer. Antoon successfully interprets nightmares considering them the symptoms of traumatized Iraqis. He investigates the effect of death on the living; he doesn’t go through the suffering of the already dead civilians. But he examines the mentality of the living after dealing with death after and before the invasion. The novel, thus, depicts nightmares of a traumatized Jawad, as a “subject” of contemporary Iraqi politics. His relationship with death exceeds the limits of time and place. While the place, as represented by the Mghaysil, as they call it in the Iraq dialect (which refers to the place where they wash corpses and shroud them), occupies an important space, it only shows the real face of death. Death, then exceeds the limits of place and follows Jawad through nightmares to his home. Those nightmares give Jawad multiple narratives as testimonies of the sufferings of

those who have left the world of the living. Jawad then appears to be traumatized by death and his daily treatment of corpses. This chapter will investigate trauma as some of its symptoms appear on the main characters in *The Corpse Washer* and how and why is it a factor in this text. The chapter also tries to examine death, as it is the main reason behind Jawad's trauma, nightmares and insomnia. The chapter first traces the timeline of Jawad's journey from childhood to adulthood, emphasizing the main political events and their effect on him.

3.1 The Story of Jawad

The story of Jawad is told via a shifting timeline including flashbacks and an interrupted narrative, but taken as a chronological personal history it lends insight into the character and the internal meaning of the book. Jawad was born in the late 1960s, a period that witnessed the transition from one government to another and marked the end of the Communist and the beginning of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq. Jawad is the youngest son of a Shiite family who lived most of its life in Baghdad. Jawad's father, Kazim, inherits the legacy of corpse washing from his family. Kazim's loyalty is to religion only, and he tries to stay away from politics. Kazim accepts his ancestors' career, which is the work of those whose hearts are pious, and are looking for Godly blessings. As a parent, Kazim is a typical Iraqi parent, with the ambition to see his kids succeed as doctors or engineers. Jawad's mother is obedient and supportive of her husband. Jawad has an older brother, Ameer, or Ammoury as they call him, who is a student at the college of medicine. Kazim's pride in his first son, Ameer the doctor, is priceless and he wishes the same kind of success for his younger son, Jawad. Ameer appreciates his father's work and supports him. When the war with Iran started, Ameer was sent to the frontline of Basra to serve his country and defend its border. Jawad has a sister as well, Shaymaa, who married while she was young and her husband

didn't get along with her father so they stayed away. The last member to be included in the circle of this family is Sabri. Sabri is Kazim's brother, a lovely and supportive uncle; a communist with an in-depth knowledge in politics. He is the one who takes Jawad out to see the world, to attend football matches and other events. Kazim warns Sabri many times of the consequences of politics and asks him to start a business. Sadly, Sabri's communist beliefs drive him to flee Iraq after the Ba'athists reached power in 1968.

Throughout his childhood, Jawad never understands the darker reality of his father's work. All he knows is that his father works at a shop. His first visit to his father's shop, the "Mghaysil", was with his mother when he was a little boy. He couldn't understand "why is this man is crying", he enquired "Does father hurt people?". The answers he receives from his mother unlocks a series of suspicions:

"Your dad washes the bodies of the dead. It is a very honorable profession and those who do it are rewarded by God"
"Why does he wash them? Are they dirty?"
"No, but they must be purified."
"And where do the dead go after they die?"
"To God. Your father tends to them before they are buried."
"How they can go to God if they are buried?"
"The soul rises to the sky, but the body remains in the earth it came from".
(Antoon 6-7)

Through the years of his work in the Mghaysil, Kazim asks Ameer to help him whenever he can. When Jawad is old enough, after his ninth-grade graduation in particular, his father takes him to the Mghaysil to teach him the basics of the job. In that visit, Jawad sees death and the process of washing the dead in detail for the first time. There, he also sees a pomegranate tree, from which he ate a lot of fruits as a child. Jawad is not courageous enough to participate, so he only watches his father performs and moves from one body part to another, reciting parts of the

Holy Qur'an and praying for those corpses. When the mission is accomplished, Jawad's father and his assistant Hammoudy return to what they were doing:

I was astonished by father's ability to return to the normal rhythm of life so easily each time after he washed as if nothing had happened. As if he were merely moving from one room to another and leaving death behind. As if death has exited with the coffin and proceeded to the cemetery and life had returned to this place. (Antoon 22)

Jawad feels that he is different from those people, he is unable to leave death in that room. Death for him is inseparable from life. He feels that his relationship to that place is not physical as his father and Hammoudy have; it is more spiritual. His encounter with death will change his life forever. Since that visit, nightmares plague Jawad disturbing his sleep. The following nightmare is one of many, where he sees death in the form of an old man:

An old man with long white hair and a long white beard wakes me up and says in a voice that seems to come from afar: Wake up, Jawad, and write down all the names! I think it very odd that he knows my name. I look at his eyes. They are a strange sky-blue color, set deep into his eye sockets. His face is laced with wrinkles as if he were hundreds of years old. I ask him flatly: Who are you? What names? He smiles: You don't recognize me? Get a pen and paper and write down all the names. Don't forget a single name. They are the names of those whose souls I will pluck tomorrow and whose bodies I will leave for you to purify. I get out of bed and bring a pen and a notebook and kneel on the ground before him and say: I'm ready. He shuts his eyes and starts to recite hundreds of names, and I write down every one. I don't remember how long we have done this, but he opens his eyes after he reads the last name. He takes a deep breath and says in a low voice: Tomorrow I shall return. Then he disappears. When I look at the notebook in front of me, I see only one sentence which I've written hundreds of times on each page: Every soul shall taste death. (Antoon 26)

Here death asks Jawad to write the names of those he is going to see tomorrow at the Mghaysil. Death also assures to him that it will continue to visit. Such nightmares increases Jawad's curiosity, as he always questions the necessity of washing the corpse. He also doubts his ability to touch a dead body and his fears prevents him from doing it. In spite of all the answers he receives, his questions remain problematic and sometimes his father ignores his remarks. He

believes that his father's decision to carry on this profession is a private issue, but to bring home its outcome is not. Thus, Jawad's relationship with his father is contrary to that between Ameer and his father. With time, they, Jawad and his father, grow apart from each other. Therefore he couldn't tell his parents about the nightmares, he only mentions some stories to his brother who advises him to obey his father.

From that summer on, Jawad spends every break in the mghaysil and "the hours of waiting for death were long and boring". To keep himself busy, Jawad starts sketching on a notebook. He starts by drawing animate faces like his father's and his assistant Hammoudy, then some inanimate ones. His father then catches him drawing a dead person's face, which upsets him because: "the dead have their sanctity". In spite of that, other drawing are good and his father and Hammoudy like them. In the mghaysil, Jawad finds that he belongs to the world of art. When school starts his art teacher praises his creative ability and encourages him to seek an artistic career. It is the career that Jawad wants, as he dreams of not being a corpse washer. Jawad wants a vibrant world with no limits to inspire him, a world with no "sanctity".

Jawad would have had more chances to escape his father's tradition if he were like his elder brother, or had his brother lived longer. His brother, Ameer "the ideal son,. . . was transferred from Doctor into Martyr". His beloved brother now needs to be purified to go to God. Henceforth, "death, ever present in father's place of work and his days, was about to declare its presence once again, but with cruelty and force that would tattoo itself on father's heart and on what was left of his years" (Antoon 11). During that time and afterwards, Jawad is highly criticized for choosing art over other careers. His final grades guarantee him engineering school, not medical school like his brother but it's another highly appreciated career in Iraq. His father wants him to be an engineer or attend any other school but not art. Jawad's love of art, sends him to Baghdad's institute of Art,

and he starts his Bachelors. There in the institute, Jawad meets Reem, she reviews theater, and he studies art. She was married to a relative of hers, Lieutenant Ayad, but his “Death had brought her back”. Reem’s presence charges Jawad’s life with happiness and takes him away from death and the world of his father. They fall in love and spend some time together, until she left him after being diagnosed with breast cancer.

Jawad’s ambition to be an artist after graduation vanishes when he works as an art teacher in a different city with a monthly check that barely lasts for a week. He also has to work in another job to make his living away from the mghaysil. The 2003 war is here now and it’s already hunting lives outside Jawad’s house, but his father’s mghaysil is closed. He and his father couldn’t work for ten days, because of the Coalition’s air force strikes. That night, death is waiting for Abu Ammoury (Jawad’s dad) to hunt his life. It has been a peaceful visit since he didn’t suffer as Jawad’s mother will tell her people. Yet, Jawad is unable to make his father’s soul rest in peace, by washing him as he had constantly asked:

I can’t... I went out to the garden and squatted in front of my father’s beloved pomegranate tree. It had drunk the water of death for decades, and now it was about to drink the water flowing out of his body through the runnel around the washing bench. My father and I were strangers, but I had never realized it until now. . . when I was young, I ate the fruit of this tree that my father would pluck and bring home. But I stopped eating it when I realized that it had drunk of the waters of death. (Antoon 64-65)

His father is dead now, and Jawad has succeeded in escaping his father’s constant questions to join him in the Mghaysil. In spite of his rejection of that job, he is still living it out: “thanks to the American” (Antoon 104), because from the day of the invasion and its aftermath “corpses piled up like goals scored by death on behalf of rabid teams in a never-ending game” (Antoon 108). Hammoudy took over the Mghaysil and is very busy making sure that each body is clean enough to go to its eternal sleep. Restocking for the mghaysil increases dramatically after the outbreak of

the sectarian war from once every six months to once monthly. In one of his visits to the market to restock, Hammoudy has disappeared. Therefore, Jawad agrees to work for couple of months, but “never thought that I would keep on washing for months and years. Were there mysterious forces taking me back to the mghaysil? Did you have something to do with it, Father? are you happy now?” (Antoon 122). Images of death, pain and violence paint Jawad’s days, while ugly nightmares hunt his nights. Years of loneliness and psychological turbulence force Jawad to leave death behind and escape to chase his dreams. He sets forth a visit to Jordan then to Europe. It is his last attempt to escape death, though he is going to leave his mother behind, just like when he left his father. Unfortunately, at the Iraqi-Jordanian border his asylum request is rejected and Jawad finds his way back to the mghaysil.

3.2 Death as a traumatizer in the context of *The Corpse Washers*

3.2.1 Death in the context of the war

The representation of sociopolitical upheavals and death along with other themes are at the core of *The Corpse Washer*. Death appears through the eyes of the broken and destroyed self of Jawad. He is our insider to the world of death and our eye witness on all the sufferings of those corpses. While the text tracks the life journey of Jawad, from childhood into adulthood. It also tracks his career transition from an artist into a corpse washer. In the same way it tracks death and its transformation over the period of war and political unrest in Iraq. Moreover, violence and death run from the Iraqi battle-field into streets with the eruption of the sectarian war, then into the human bodies. Both violence and death continue their journey into his own life and dreams, leaving him isolated and traumatized. In this text we see Jawad giving up the job of his dreams, losing his beloved and imprisoning himself in his father’s shop.

Jawad shows how the twist in the plot leads to his tragedy. It is during the US-led invasion, he loses his father and afterword his job, he has only death left to work with. Death then appears lucrative yet demanding. Death already showed control through the repetitive nightmares and day dreams that Jawad tries to escape before the invasion. When he sees death talking to him and appearing in different images, despite escaping the maghysil, Jawad believes that death is hunting him, and dragging him into its world. That belief comes true when the Iraqis turned into “a grist to the mill” with the eruption of the Shia-Sunni disintegration, as Paul Starkey reviews. The text shows death, “thanks to the Americans” in particular, who gave power and weapons to different militias and set a war between them. The mghaysil is located in the center of Baghdad’s Shiite neighborhood, where Jawad and his father works for people of the Shiite belief. Before the 2003 war, the mghaysil received a reasonable amount of corpses. The place is quiet and death appears peacefully as its victims surrender with heart attack or an accident. The transformation in the political scene after 2003 shown its result in the mghaysil. From that time on death start to play a fundamental role to the movement of the events. While Iraqis are fighting each other, Jawad will “look at people’s faces and think who among them will end up on the bench next for me to wash” (Antoon 131). Jawad believes that life and death are “conjoined, sculpting each other” as he and his follow citizen are trapped in a world between gun fire and camphor. That same world gave rise to the trades of camphor and shrouds and ends that of art.

That eruption and chaos allows new forms of violence to appear. Unfamiliar vicious scenes emerge when the human body that is used to carry and hide weapons is turned into a weapon itself. Jawad sees and hears the daily news of terrorist attacks who use their bodies, cars any animate or inanimate thing to create horrific scenes in the public. Iraqis started to see death in the market places, near the school or inside their cars, because no place is safe now as Jawad believes: “I was

at the mghaysil making the most of a respite without bodies and reading a book about Mesopotamian creation myths when I heard on the radio that a suicide bomber had attacked al-Mutanabbi Street and the Shahbandar café, killing more than thirty people”. (Antoon 161). For Jawad, that means that new corpses with different signs of brutality are going to appear at his workplace. Indeed nightmares already showed him what happen to the body after such attacks. He sees a man in a winter coat in the middle of summer who is trying to hide his exploding body. Jawad sees the explosion and the flying body parts and feels them, he runs to the mghaysil and lays down to die. Instead of dying he wakes up, like with all other nightmares:

I noticed that the young man standing in front of me was wearing a coat, even though it was warm. He kept turning and looking back at the line as if looking for someone. He looked at his watch a number of times. A few minutes later he stepped aside and put his hand into his coat pocket and pulled something which triggered a huge explosion. I felt his blood on my face and his body parts striking my body. Some of the bodies of those waiting in line were scattered. Corpses scattered around and I saw people running and screaming, but all I could hear was a strange whistle. I touched my body and was astonished that it was intact. I ran to the exit and out to the street. I headed to the mghaysil and opened the faucet to wash myself. I lay down on the washing deck to die, but instead I awoke. (Antoon 159)

Jawad has not been before in a place where a car, or suicidal bomber will explode and or near it. He will see the outcome of such attacks in his workplace and feel the blood covering his face in his dreams and nightmares. He is not like Hadi of Saadwi's text, where Hadi will run to the scene to collect body part. Jawad is there in the mghaysil waiting for the body parts to reach him. Those images of corporeal violence are seen through the corpses that Jawad washes daily. The young man of his dreams kills himself and many others except for Jawad. Jawad is meant to be alive, even when he tries to wash himself on the bench as a dead corpse, he wakes up to continue his mission. Indeed, Jawad is more like the Wahtsitsname, of Saadawi than Hadi. He has a mission though he has not chosen it; it is death in the new Iraq that chooses those who will undertake this

job. Jawad's mission is to clean and shroud the corpses that the Wahtsitsname make his body out of.

Those images targets the character's self and mind leaving him broken, in pain and unable to breathe. Because the situation in the new Iraq is like that of the colonial territories that Mbembe mentions in his "Necropolitics" and that the war in Iraq is similar to that wars. Mbembe states that the

war is no longer waged between armies of two sovereign states. It is waged by armed groups acting behind the mask of the state against armed groups that have no state but control very distinct territories; both sides having as their main targets civilian populations that are unarmed or organized into militias (Mbembe 35).

Which could be applied to Iraq's wars. Iraq's different political and religious militias are fighting against each other over power and money. Each group has representatives in the Iraqi-coalition made Parliament. Those representatives control the political scene, and their militias control the street. Consequently, death appears in different shapes and demonstrates control over the world. Moreover death is routinized, "we had gotten used to car and suicide bombs. . . In the evening, I saw the scenes of the aftermath that we have become accustomed to after each attack: puddles of blood, human remains, scattered shoes and slippers, smoke, and people standing in shock, wiping their tears or covering their faces" (Antoon 161). Death turns into daily news and the dead are a mere number in a statistics. The fighting between the sectarian groups increased and reached its limit in 2005 when one of the holy mosques of Samara was attacked and exploded. It is a Shi' mosque located in a Sunni city, therefore each group is blaming the other for the attack. That assault marked a reign of fire that burned most Iraqis. If you are a Sunni living in a Shi'i city, you will receive death threats. That is another form of death where Jawad sometimes washes a corpse

of a man with a bullet in the head or another whose body has many holes that are made with a drill.

His friend who is fleeing the country is narrating a similar story:

Man. It's really absurd. I'm Shiite, but my son's name is Omar. I named him after my best friend, who happened to be Sunni. They left a note in front of the door threatening me and telling me to leave the neighborhood. They thought I was Sunni. I asked him, "Who are 'they'?" "I don't know really," he said. "Armed men who control the neighborhood and are killing left and right. I asked and looked around. I wanted someone to get the word to them that Abu Omar is not Sunni, but it was no use. Then I got another letter saying, 'This is the last warning. The next letter will not be written on paper and will pierce your head.' A week after that two bullets broke our bed- room window. Thank God, we weren't at home. (Antoon 163-64)

Those militias generate the physical form of death as they constitute the machines that hunt lives easily and grow voraciously. Jawad needs to wash the corpses of those victims who are trapped in the middle of the struggle of the different political parties which affects him emotionally and psychologically. Corpses reached Jawad's shop marked with signs of the "obscene, vulgar and grotesque" uses of politics and death. Jawad's return to the mghaysil after years of resistance wasn't easy. He is defeated by death and the will of his ancestors. He says:

Every day of the week was difficult, but Thursday was the day al- Fartusi's refrigerated truck arrived with the weekly harvest of death: those who were plucked from their families and lives, tossed into the garbage in Baghdad's outskirts, thrown into the river, or rotting in the morgue. Most of them had no papers or IDs and no one knew their names. Instead of names, I wrote down the causes of death in my notebook: a bullet in the forehead, strangulation marks around the neck, knife stabs in the back, mutilation by electric drill, head- less body, fragmentation caused by suicide bomb. (Antoon 131)

Thursday is the day when Al-Fartusi bury Jawad with piles of corpses of missing people, whose relatives couldn't find. Al-Fartusi believes that it is his job to honor them with a proper burial and he needs Jawad to prepare them. He couldn't see the weight of that humanitarian act. on Jawad. When Jawad washes and shrouds a complete body he had nightmares, but when he deals with a body that is rotten in the morgue and with no official papers or ID he suffers. Death of those

corpses traumatized him. It pervaded his life as a “mediator of redemption”. Jawad believes that “death is not content with what it takes from me in my waking hours, it insists on haunting me even in my sleep. Isn’t it enough that I toil all day tending to its eternal guests, preparing them to sleep in its lap? Is death punishing me because I thought I could escape its clutches?” (Antoon 3). Death has sculpted his dreams and turns him into a corpse washer machine. The hand that once has lived and worked in art, is dead now from all the corpses it touches. Still the different images and scenes that Jawad sees every Thursday is the most shocking. Death is no longer subject to its victims “it is experienced as a release from terror and bondage” (Mbembe 39). Death terrorizes Jawad and traumatizes him, leaving him suffering and lonely. The trauma that we are referring to, here, is the psychological war-related trauma. It is different from other types of trauma including early childhood violence, complex trauma, community violence, domestic violence, bullying, medical trauma, and physical or sexual abuse.

3.2.2 Death and Trauma

The word trauma is derived from the ancient Greek word meaning “wound”. In this manner, trauma “exhibits a set of extraordinary challenges to understand its references” (Marder 1). It can also refer to the state of mind that suffers an injury. Psychologically speaking that injury “is a fantasy which can be read as an articulation of trauma. It is a devastating and damaging experience” (Erikson 184). It also refers to a state of unspeakable truth or “an experience lived belatedly at the level of its unspeakable truth which is revealed in psychoanalytic theory” (Ibid 184). The term and meaning of trauma is more associated with “inter-subjectivity, mentalization, association, dissociation, nonlinear dynamic theory, and mental enactments” because it has been taken from a “stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behavior” to a “state or condition produced by such a stress or blow” (ibid 184).

Furthermore, trauma has “political and social dimensions” because the traumatic events often “happen due to social forces as well as in the social world” (Marder 1). Contemporary trauma studies originated in the 1980s, with the inclusion of “post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the diagnostic canon of medical and psychiatric professions”. It all started when a group of US veterans who participated in the Vietnam spread awareness about the effects of war to those who are going to the war or the coming soldiers. The group increased in number and their effect reached all America, as they researched “the impact of wartime experiences on combatants” (Whitehead 4). They showed the results of their research in a “five-volume study of the psychological legacy of Vietnam” emphasizing the symptoms of PTSD on the returning soldiers. The effect of this study acknowledged the American Psychiatric Association that “a psychiatric disorder could be wholly environmentally determined and that a traumatic event occurring in adulthood could have lasting psychological consequences” (ibid 4). That study also introduced trauma theory to the world and started to form a branch of psychological/literary study.

One of the pioneers of the psychological study of trauma is Cathy Caruth. She believes that trauma is “unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradiction of experience and language” (cited in Balaev 1). Her edited book *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*, gathers the initial studies of trauma from different disciplines including literature, sociology, art and psychiatry. She believes in the “trans-disciplinary nature of trauma” and, that the changes in understanding and using the term trauma increased recently increasing with it the context in which trauma can fit in. Derived from the veterans’ group study and her researches, Caruth believes that “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event” (Caruth 5). This image or incident keeps haunting and visiting the traumatized person who is going to increase his interest in it. This traumatic event, generally involve a “threat to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal

encounter with violence and death” (Herman 33). Therefore, the traumatic event disturbs the victim’s regular day to day existence and harms his reality. The victim then becomes traumatized or in Caruth’s words: “possessed by an image or event” (p. 5). Erickson (1995) states that the traumatized subject holds on to the traumatizing moment, preventing it from slipping back into its proper chronological place in the past, “and relives it over and over again in the compulsive musings of the day and the seething dreams of night. The moment becomes a season, the events become a condition” (p. 184). This relationship between the event or the image and the experience, in the history or a form of memory is the source of trauma to her: “the traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth 5). Here analysis is derived from Freud’s concept of “afterwardsness”, as Whitehead believes. Freud uses the term “belatedness” to refer to “the ways in which certain experiences impressions and memory traces are revised at later date in order to corresponds with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development” (Whitehead 5). The event itself doesn’t affect the traumatized in the moment of its occurrence, its memory soon or later is going to rework. This “deferred action” for Freud, is the same belated event that Caruth emphasizes to be the main cause of trauma. She also depends on Freud’s analysis of trauma in “Moses and Monotheism” where the event returns to effect the victim. Freud says:

It may happen that a man who has experienced some frightful accident- a railway collision, for instance- leaves the scene of the event apparently uninjured. In the course of the next few weeks, however, he develops a number of severe psychical and motor symptoms which can only be traced to his shock, the concussion or whatever else it was. He now has a “traumatic neurosis” (Freud 309, Cited in Whitehead 12)

Caruth demonstrates her analysis of the belatedness of the effect of the image of the event, which is for her the true power of trauma. She also says: “The impact of the traumatic event lies

precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” (9). Then she believes that the effect of the event or image appears in the form of a hunting ghost in which “the ghost represents an appropriate embodiment of the disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present” (Whitehead 6). Caruth then assures Freud assumption that the victim’s pain is unseen, while there could be a kind of “daemonic power” possess them. Marder, explains that the traumatic event is, therefore,

a strange sort of an event because once it is understood as a belated consequence of a “missed encounter,” trauma itself must be understood in terms of “absence”—the absence of something that failed to become located in time or place—rather than as a “positive” presence. This absence at the heart of the traumatic event lends it its constitutive ghostly quality. And because of this absence, people who have suffered traumatic experiences can become so “possessed” by them that they frequently describe themselves as living “ghosts.”
(2)

In the light of this, Caruth considers fiction and literature as the source for expressing trauma, especially the stories that deal with haunted and isolated characters. Here trauma fiction gives access to history especially in texts that are not “straightforward referential”. The term trauma fiction tracks “the recent journey of the concept of trauma from medical and scientific discourse to the field of literary studies” (Whitehead 4). Caruth and other contemporary theorists suggest that trauma theory “is inherently linked to the literary in ways that it has not always reconsidered” (Whitehead 4). Some texts that deal with “unresolved past events” offer new “interpretations and understandings” of the issue. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is a good example, where the mother appears to be haunted by the ghost of her daughter, whom she killed years ago and who returns seeking her mother’s love. More texts appear to deal with trauma are those of the Holocaust like Michele Roberts *Daughters of the House* (1993), and Anne Michael’s *Fugitive*

Pieces (1997), and world war I or II like Pat Barker's *Another World* (1998). Those texts carry ghosts of the dead victims among their characters who hunt the present traumatizing its people.

Situating trauma in the psychological context of such casualties, including war, produce a category of victims that are traumatized but unaware of it. Trauma in such context then helps highlight crisis and express reality of today or the past. Thus, trauma for Caruth is the "crisis of truth" (6), which expresses what is beyond the individual's sufferings. Trauma then is an "inherent latency" of the event and in that it also helps access a historical experience (Whitehead 7). In the light of the previous definition and analysis of trauma I will look at Sinan Antoon's book, *The Corpse Washer*, as contemporary fictional representation of the traumatic effect of war and death. The text, as we said earlier, handles the life story of Jawad who lives in continuous inner struggle between his desires and what the reality forces him to carry. A trauma framework helps to understand the effects of his stormy life, difficult relationship with family, and his inability to communicate or express his misery to the world have caused the wound inside him. A wound that keeps on crying and refuse to surrender.

3.3 *The Corpse Washer as a story of traumatized Iraq*

While *Frankenstein in Baghdad* focuses on abandoned corpses that are stitched up into one body which seems represent the fault-lines of Iraqi society, this text is more concerned with the way some of the lucky corpses get ready for their eternal sleep. As in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the dead chase the living, but in *The Corpse Washer* this occurs in nightmares which leave the living in a confused state of mind when awake. In the previous chapter on Saadawi's novel, I compared the entering of the soul into the monster's body to the American-led invasion

to Iraq. In Antoon's case, the invasion is associated with sexual violence. The opening scene of the novel emphasizes this claim. Jawad sees in a nightmare his beloved, Reem, being raped and tortured by a group of American soldiers: "I scream again, but cannot hear my screams. I hear only Reem's shrieks, the laughter and grunts of the men, the sound of the rain" (Antoon, 2014, p.

2). Suleri believes that there is a relation between occupation and sexual assault:

Throughout history, invasion and occupation of countries are often described in terms of sexual violence. Nehru, when describing the British treatment of India writes, "They seized her body and possessed her, but it was a possession of violence. . . They didn't know her or try to know her. They never looked into her eyes, for theirs were averted and, hers cast down through shame and humiliation. (Suleri 1992, Cited in Mahmoud)

The Americans invaded Iraq and violently assault its existence. Though Reem left Iraq before the invasion, she didn't see the war or experience any loss. Still, she suffers like hundreds of women of her time from breast cancer. Cancer spread in Iraq after the Gulf war of the 1991, as "uranium munitions were deployed on a large scale" over the country (Nixon 200). The outcome of that war slowly invaded the life of all, mostly children and women. Reem represents the sufferings of women as Antoon tries to show the depth of the destruction of the body of the nation.

Jawad, as citizen in of the nation represents a collective Iraqi victimhood, who are physically and psychologically abused by war and violence until he sees his own body sinking in a puddle of blood. Jawad then decides to escape, like many of his fellow citizens. Until that decision the novel then emphasizes a succession of uncounted tragedies, all of which produce a traumatized Iraq and its citizens, leaving them half dead and half alive. Trauma is an illusionary response to the effects of war and violence in particular because it appear to have "a constitutive function of today's world, structuring and sustaining our way of existence and of socio-political and transnational intelligibility" (3) as Martin Jay states in his *Refractions of Violence*. Violence

is everywhere in Iraq. It constitutes part of the scene of death, it actually serves death. Every tortured victim of the daily massacres sees a lot of violence and experiences it before they finally die. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri see violence as “a permanent condition” and the “primary organizing principle of society”. Further, it is “the general matrix for all relations of power and techniques of domination” (12-13). Therefore Antoon tries to show the effect of violence and consequently death physically on the dead and mentally on Jawad. He also focuses on how violence and death slowly invade Jawad’s life until death controls it. The use of violence in such a way produce fictional trauma texts which as Laurie Vickory remarks “help readers to access traumatic experience,” which helps “to disclose silenced accounts of history” (1). Antoon feels the need of telling the world the amount of crisis through such accounts. Those traumatic accounts are “attempts to deal with these experiences of human suffering” (Andermahr, 2013, 3).

Trauma, in particular, is a permanent effect in the lives of those who survived death as Antoon emphasizes in *The Corpse Washer*. Antoon shows examples of how most of the characters in the novel are traumatized by the scenes of death. Death tries to control Jawad’s world and plays the protagonist role. The text as well emphasis that fact since it deals with the dead more than the living just like in Saddawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The writers agree on the theme of death as the controller of the Iraqi scene. If Jawad is the protagonist of the livings then death as the Whatsitsname is the protagonist of both worlds. Writers stress the idea that the scene of death is familiar and is part of the daily routine. It is this because Iraq is partly occupied by the neo-American led occupation and death is the “face of politics” as Mbembe believes. Fanon on the other hand states that in all colonies the colonist always destroys the colonized and turns it “into a kind of quietness of evil”. This evil is in the shape of the militia’s wars that hunt the lives of many

Iraqis. The Whatsitsname lives out of death's casualties and Jawad out of its outcome. Hayfaa Baytar believes that:

Death is the protagonist of the novel, and all the characters around him are small, if not trivial. A love story brought together Reem, whose husband was martyred, and Jawad, whose brother was martyred in the Iran-Iraq War. The story begins when Reem and Jawad fall for each other and thanks to the generosity of the martyrs, the husband and the brother. Then death itself separates them with Reem is diagnosed with breast cancer because nuclear radiation made the proportion of cancer patients increase dramatically... Jawad's dream of studying art is shattered in a reality where death, explosions, assassinations, horrific crimes, Sectarian conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites, and attempts to avenge the old Baathists.

Jawad is an aspiring artist who despises the scene of death since his first encounter with it in his father's workshop. His trauma begins in his formative years, when he graduates fifth grade and visits the mghaysil with his father. Jawad sees for the first time the real treatment the corpse receives after its death. He learns there that the dead need to be washed and cleaned before their burial. This scene makes Jawad wonder on number of issues, do the dead feel that, what are they going to say and what is the importance of this process? From that time on death accompanies Jawad throughout his life. Death first perplexed Jawad especially when a different scene appeasers at the doors of the mghaysil. When a corpse that "looked as if a pack of wolves had attacked it and devoured much of the skin and flesh" needs to be washed, Jawad looks for answers. The body is a car accident victim. Do the dead feel the pain of washing their bodies after such an accident, is he allowed to touch it? Jawad keeps his mind searching for answers. Anyhow his father tells him to wash a corpse "as long as there is a part carrying the heart" (Antoon 25). Jawad needs to remember this speech because he is going to need it the years to come. He sees faces every day, young and old, fresh and pale but they are going to be his only world: "My memory became a notebook for the faces of the dead. I was on my way home one day when I realized that aside from Mahdi and my mother, I was living my days exclusively with the dead" (Antoon 131). Due to that,

his relationship with death doesn't end at the doors of the mghaysil. He is seeing death everywhere he goes, each face of a dead person brings another memory. Since that time nightmares start to visit him. Sequences of scary and sometimes repetitive nightmares invade his life. His early nightmares are mostly about death and some of the faces of the dead he helped wash as a child before quitting the job before 2003. He is haunted by death, like the soldier from Freud's analysis of trauma, where nightmares "represents a re-entry into the experience and state of terror" (Whitehead 17). Freud's soldier is unable to escape nightmares just like Jawad. Only that Freud's notices of the shell shocked soldier that its of past experience that haunts the present while, for Antoon it's the present that it keeps repeating itself in different scenes. Nightmare after nightmare invade Jawad's night, reminds him of death and its different styles, techniques and figures. Once, he sees the TV talking to him, with a scene of some sort of leader beheading a man. That nightmare left him in a room full of blood. Sometimes he wakes up and the nightmare never ends.

That encounter with death releases the nightmares that trouble Jawad's relationship with his father over the coming years of their lives. Jawad becomes traumatized by death, and that "traumatic experience" "can produce a sometimes indelible effect on the human psyche that can change the nature of an individual's memory, self-recognition and relational life" as Vickory (2002, 11) explains. Jawad's life has changed completely since that early experience. The traumatized Jawad doesn't share with or tell his parents about his mentality or the nightmares, keeping them hidden. To be more independent, Jawad worked his emotions into his painting in spite of having no training on the subject:

Father's disappointment was visible on his face: "so that what it comes down to? A painter I've been waiting all these years for someone to help me out on the job and ease my burden." He repeated the word "painter" again as if it were a disgrace. What is wrong with it? I said "it is a decent a job. "and our profession

isn't descent? Not good enough for you, is it? My father, my grandfather and his grandfather all did it, now you are too good got us. Well, thanks ever so much.
(77)

Jawad doesn't tell his father that he is escaping from death and its scene. He is trying to avoid it to end the cycle of nightmares. Despite that, Jawad finds himself in a place where he is unable to breathe, a place covered with white sheets and smelling of camphor.

I'm standing next to a washing bench. It isn't in the mghaysil, but rather in some other place I've never visited. There are high ceilings, but no windows. There are neon lights, some of which blink. The bench is very long. It extends for tens of meters and has a white conveyor belt. Bodies are stacked on it. The belt moves toward the right and leads to a huge opening, and outside men wearing blue overalls and white gloves carry the bodies and throw them into a huge truck. Scores of water faucets protrude from the wall, each with an empty washbasin and a bowl under it. I hear a voice yell: "What are you waiting for?" I turn to look for the voice and see Father sitting on a chair in the corner, his worry beads in his hand. (75)

The dream imagery of the nightmare is used here to understand the issues that arise from the traumatic experience. Jawad's source of nightmares is death and his experience with death is because of his father. He is unable to confront his father and tell him the truth about these feelings towards death and his father keeps him in the prison of his nightmares. Not only that, Jawad's nightmares are a recurring motif in the novel as well, because they effects the whole text. Kai Erikson clarifies "trauma involves a continual reliving of some wounding experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashback and hallucinations and in a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances" (184). Jawad's constant nightmares hunt his hours of rest and refuse to let him escape their grasp.

At the same time, Jawad's reality isn't devoid of his nightmares, every once in a while a terrorist attack happens targeting groups of civilians. These attacks are indiscriminate, and even

the holy places and mosques could not be saved. When Jawad sees the news or hears explosions he believes that his mghaysil is going to be crowded:

I am washing the corpse of a skinny old man with white hair and a wrinkly face and forehead. My mind wanders. The man opens his eyes, shakes his head, and tries to get up. The small bowl falls from my hand and I retreat from the bench in fear. He says in a hoarse voice, “I didn’t think that I would have to do this myself, but you can’t focus and keep thinking of silly shit.” He picks up the bowl, fills it with water, and pours it on his head. He reaches for the ground lotus. I try to give him a hand, but he refuses and tells me to go away and sit down. Dozens of corpses start coming from every direction. Some come through the main door, others from the side door which leads to the small garden. Some come out of the storage room. Some wear nothing but a cloth around the waist. Others are shrouded and trying to shed their shrouds as they approach the washing bench. Corpses begin to wash one another and others stand in line around the bench awaiting their turns. Their numbers multiply and they fill the entire mghaysil, leaving no place for me. I go out into the street, but throngs of living corpses are surrounding the place, filling the streets and sidewalks. I start to suffocate, then bolt awake. (Antoon 138)

At the end of the day Jawad believes he is united with those victims and shares them their pain: “this self-witnessing of violence stages a relationship between embodied and disembodied violence, between the terror of violence inflicted on the physical self and the concurrent psychic processing of the event” (Bahooora 185). The list of events that Jawad keeps witnessing with violent outcomes is extensive including the sectarian war, terrorist attacks and kidnaping, all in which death knows no end. Death appears every time in different shape, keeping Jawad full handed: “He must give the dead barbarians faces and names. And there are more every day” (Antoon 2013, 34). His nightmares express the unspoken violence of daily encounter with dismembered corpses that he once refused to touch. It gives him a space to express hidden feelings of fear and disgust and pity, and at the same time express what those corpses had suffered.

Some years earlier Jawad turned to art as a way to escape this world. It is his space to express the unheard and unspoken. Art helps him strive in the world of death and cope with its

regular scenes. It also enables him at some point to survive his trauma. But unfortunately art has no future with Jawad, and just like his family members are leaving him, his fellow-artists also start to disappear. The process of isolating Jawad starts early with the loss of his brother the martyr Amoury, then his art teacher in high school who is called to the frontline during the war with Iran. Then a friend from his military service in the army is also going to leave him when he is killed when the American air craft used to shoot some places here and there in an attempt to keep the Iraqi government under the control during the 1990s. Basim died in one of those attacks along with six more soldiers. The process will continue with the disappearance of his beloved Reem, then his father during the days of the American led invasion and finally Hamoudy, his assistant. Even his academy gets its share of the destruction. His world is completely empty and scary and when the chance comes to him he couldn't seize it. He lives in intolerable isolation of which he is unaware. To deal with this isolation he finds his ways through it within himself. He sees the statues he dreams of making dead and he is shrouding them:

I think I hear a groan. I approach the statue and the groans grow louder. I discover that the statue is shrouded in white. When I get closer, I hear a male voice begging me to sprinkle water on it.

"who are you and why are you stooping like that" I ask.

"this is how I was when I died and I cannot move. Please, take me to the water, because I am suffering.

I hold the figure by its shoulder, which are very cold, and drag it toward the fountain. I place it at the fountain's edge so that the water will spray the statue's head. The voice sighs and asks me to push it into the fountain's waters. I do. Before comprehending what has happened, I hear another groan and a voice saying "Me too, please. (Antoon 120)

Jawad sees, hears and feels the pain of the dead. After all those years with them, he not only cleans them, he communicates with them through dreams. Every touch or move makes him feel their sufferings, unachieved dreams and their desire to escape. He feels them because he is one with them. He is a living creature with a dead heart, unachieved dreams and a desire to escape.

He wants to take his statues and dreams to a place full of colors and life. He seeks a place where he can't smell camphor or touch the stiffened objects. It is not easy in a world full of death that keeps isolating him at every stage of his growth. Therefore, all his earlier attempts to question the legality of this profession is because he senses the presence of death. Death hurts Jawad and leaves a wound inside his senses, that his brain can only feel. This pain is not the product of this particular vision, it is the accumulation of old visits to the mghaysil. Therefore he is traumatized by that vision, the old scene and feeling of the corpses. Freud reads this as he states that:

the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event” but rather an event that “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivors” (Beyond the Pleasure Principle cited in Caruth, 1996, 3-4).

Jawad's un-physical wound leaves its marks unhealed for years. He doesn't know how to stop its cry nor able to, in spite of all the distance between the Jawad and the mghaysil. His touch of the first body lived in his memory for ever. Being far from the mghaysil doesn't erase it or heal the wound it caused. That is the traumatic wound that is not easy to heal. He is sure that death and the mghaysil are the reason behind his sufferings but is unfamiliar with the consequences. Because the old scenes of death are going to be transformed as Antoon emphasizes the effect of invasion on the invaded subjects:

Everything has changed now:

The shoulder is a shelf for coffins

The eye a well of tears

The lung a valley for death (Antoon 2013, 34).

Antoon reassembles Iraq into a human body, just like Saadawi. Saadawi's body comes to life and is powerful and strong, seeking revenge for his body parts. But Atoon's body suffers from

many cuts and wounds and cries for help and is unable to rest. Death reaches every doorstep and Jawad is the first to see. During the days of the war his father dies and this means he needs to put his father's will into practice. His father's asks Jawad to wash him but throughout their life together they have had lots of disagreement and cause each other disappointments. Lastly when Jawad shows his refusal to work with his father forever. Jawad regrets that end, and blames himself for never trying to reconcile with his father. Moreover, the traumatized Jawad is unable to carry on a good relationship with his father because his father reminds him of death. Jawad believes that his father as the owner of that place is responsible for his trauma. Therefore Jawad tries to abandon that place and reject any attempt to revisit it. He ignores that death is the traumatizer, not his father.

Death whispers to Jawad and talks to him through nightmares. Even statues of his favorite artist Giacometti lay on the bench and ask him to wash them:

We have a dead man we want to wash and shroud," he said. "Sure. Where is the corpse?" I asked. One of the two young men lowered his head. The other looked at me. The older man extended the hand holding the black bag and said in a trembling voice: "We have only the head." I stood silent for about twenty seconds and couldn't say anything. I had washed a corpse with its severed head a few months ago, but this was the first time I got a head by itself. . . .As I poured the water, I wondered about the torture he had suffered right before his head was severed. What was the last thought that went through his head? Could he see, or did they deprive him of the right to face his killers? Could he hear what they were saying? Why, and in what or whose name, did they sever it? Was he a victim of the sectarian war or just thugs? (Antoon 155-56)

Consequently, it is easy in the middle of this to be traumatized, and Jawad accepts it because he has no other option left. After years of fighting with death and its trauma, Jawad finally surrenders and accepts his work for death. Hayfaa Baytar also says "How can we call what we live is a life, when death has generosity and appetite as if it were addicted to humans, or as if it had been corrupted? How can we dare and say: What we live is a life, and we see the dogs maim the

bodies of soldiers and dead”. Jawad’s life is not an easy one and he doesn’t see only himself dead, but also his beloved Reem:

She is lying naked on her back on a marble bench in an open place with no walls or ceilings. There is no one around and nothing in sight except the sand. I, too, am naked, barefoot, dumbfounded by everything around me. I can feel the sand under my feet and a cool wind. I moved slowly toward the bench. When and why has she come back after all these years? (Antoon 1) ... I can’t grasp what is going on. I ask in a loud voice, “Reem, what are you doing here?” I am about to hug and kiss her, but she warns me: “Don’t kiss me. Wash me first so we can be together and then. (Antoon 1)

Reem is his beloved for years and they decide to live together for ever, but she disappears from Jawad’s life and keeps visiting him only in such nightmares. Reem is also traumatized by war and its effects. She doesn’t experience loss, since she left the country before the war. Her trauma comes after finding out that she has breast cancer that forced her to leave Jawad and Iraq. She is traumatized because she is possessed by the image of her new body. She is missing an important part of her identity, and feels that she lost her pride and dignity as well. The image of her body after the surgery reminds her of all the battles she lost with losing that part. She lost Jawad and all the dreamy life together, and she lost her friends and country. In a letter to Jawad, she expresses the depth of her pain when she says:

I am undergoing chemotherapy now and my days are full of nausea, headaches, and vomiting. My long hair, which you stroked, is all gone. They say it will grow again after treatment, but I find that hard to believe right now. My chest scar has yet to heal, because I suffered an infection after the surgery. I woke up after surgery to find a big wound as if someone had stabbed me and stolen away the breast you so loved and called one of the domes of your pagan temple. They took that breast away from me and it is no longer part of my body. I couldn’t muster the courage to stand before the mirror—except once. I broke down afterward and cried for hours. I’m struck with the storms of irrational thoughts and feelings which inhabit anyone whose body is afflicted with sickness. Why? Why me? I’m still too young for it. I’m not forty yet. The doctor back in Baghdad said that cancer rates have quadrupled in recent years and it might be the depleted uranium used in the ordnance in 1991. I hate my body now and wish I

could run away from it to a new body. I don't think I could live in peace with it.
Forgive me for going on and on so selfishly about my fears and thoughts.
(Antoon 114)

Her suffering is similar to a whole generation of Iraqi women. She is unable to cope with it and that is why she never returns to Jawad. To escape the image of her wound she left Jawad so she doesn't see pity in his eyes. She visits him in his dreams and asks him to wash her because only death can bring them together again.

Another character also appears to be traumatized in the text, its Sabri, Jawad's uncle. Sabri escapes the country before the hands of death reach him. Sabri is a communist, who by chance is one of those who escaped Iraq during the 1980s. Through Sabri's story Antoon reveals a lot of facts about the life of the Communists in Iraq before and after the invasion. "Father rarely mentioned my uncle Sabri, who was eight years his junior. The few times the topic of Communists and their clashes with Ba'thists came up, he would say: "Sabri's people." The transition of power to the Ba'athist ends the Communist role in Iraq. By end, it means to get rid of them before they protest the government. Consequently lots of communist were arrested and executed and the lucky ones escaped the country. They are lucky to escape death but they don't escape trauma. Sabri is one of them and he "was a jovial man who always filled my pockets [Jawad's] with sweets and played soccer with Ammoury and me in the street in front of our house. He was obsessed with the al-Zawra' team and he told me that I, too, would one day become a Zawra' fan" (Antoon 80). Sabri spends some years of his life moving from one country to another until settling down in Germany. He lived there until Jawad informs him in a letter about his father's death. His journey to Iraq is full of passion and memories, but the moment he arrives Bagdad he has a different feeling:

We entered Iraq at dawn and it was a painful sight. The man welcoming me back to my country after all these years of wandering and exile was an American

soldier who told me: ‘Welcome to Iraq!’ Can you imagine?’ He said that the soldier had written his own name, “‘William,” in Arabic on his helmet. “I told him: This is my country.” Uncle Sabri shook his head and said that he was against the war and had demonstrated against it like millions in Germany and all over the world, but he never thought the Americans would be so irresponsible and inept. The border checkpoint with Jordan had only three soldiers and only one Iraqi official, who was wearing slippers and stamping passports. He asked the official who decided who was allowed in and who was not, and he said the American officer decided. “I just stamp.” (Antoon 85)

After wandering around Baghdad and visiting some of his old favorite places, Sabri’s heart bleeds for his country. He re-visits the Communist center in Bagdad and tries to support them but it is too late. Sabri is unable to believe what he is seeing “Look at it now. Then you have all this garbage, dust, barbed wires and tanks ... this is not the Baghdad I’d imagined” (Antoon, 2014, p. 96). This scene recalls Scarry’s definition of the effect of war as “alter[ing] the surface, shape, and deep eternity of the objects that human beings recognize as extensions of themselves” (p. 64). Iraq appears empty of human spirit, love disappears and peace is nowhere to be seen. Iraq is a nation of different sects and cultures, rich of resources and has great history, but all Sabri can see is garbage and wires. Sabri has big dreams for his Communist party, but he couldn’t believe that they did nothing to save their country. The hostility of the war affects the Iraqis the most, as they are confronting everything around them bare handed. Everything is important in Iraq, except for the civilians who are left with no electricity, no law and order. Sabri has to leave Iraq because he already has established a life in Germany. He promises to keep in touch with Jawad and Iraq. Sabri leaves with a pain in the heart and a tear in the eye. He publishes a piece of writing describing his visit to Iraq:

“A Lover Pauses before Iraq’s Ruins.”

Iraqis and palm trees. Who resembles whom? There are millions of Iraqis and as many, or perhaps somewhat fewer, palm trees. Some have had their fronds burned. Some have been beheaded. Some have had their backs broken by time,

but are still trying to stand. Some have dried bunches of dates. Some have been uprooted, mutilated and exiled from their orchards. Some have allowed invaders to lean on their trunk. Some are combing the winds with their fronds. Some stand in silence. Some have fallen. Some stand tall and raise their heads high despite everything in this vast orchard: Iraq. When will the orchard return to its owners? Not to those who carry axes. Not even to the attendant who assassinates palm trees, no matter what the color of his knife. (Antoon 97-98)

The Iraqis relationship with palm trees is deep and ancient. It is not only a source of nutrition only, it represents them nationally and culturally. It stands there in the middle of the desert receiving all the miseries of the war and still standing supporting people with dates. It represents the Iraqis who are trying to live in spite of all the wars. Unfortunately the destruction is everywhere and it even affects the human soul, as much as it affect the palm trees. Sabri is traumatized by the scene of his ruined country. It is true that humans look normal to Sabri but their souls are like the palm trees burned, beheaded and broken.

Both traumatized characters, Sabri and Reem, have left Iraq to Jawad to deal with all that alone. Jawad as the main character is traumatized by death, even before the invasion. His people will fall down like the fruits of the pomegranate tree one after the other: “I am like the pomegranate tree, but all my branches have been cut, broken, and buried with the dead. My heart has become a shriveled pomegranate beating with death and falling every second into a bottomless pit. But no one knows. No one. The pomegranate alone knows” (Antoon 184). Just like all the palm trees, that Jawad’s uncle resemble them to the Iraqis. Jawad identifies himself with the pomegranate tree whose fruit he has ate as a little boy. Now its lonely and cut-off from the outside world, its drinking the water of the dead and living out of them bitterly. Antoon suggests that even trees and other animate and inanimate objects couldn’t survive the wave of violence that invade the country. Jawad’s journey to this conclusion is not easy, as he tries many times to escape, but who can escape death? The Wahtsitsname of Saadawi is powerful and is able to reach anybody. Since he considers

himself the ideal citizen, then citizens like Jawad need to stay and support him with the body parts he needs. Jawad's final attempt to escape ends on the Iraqi borders, where his asylum request is rejected. Before leaving he visits the Imam and prays:

I started a silent conversation with al-Kazim. I told him: Forgive me for not visiting you for so many years, but I have chosen another path. A path paved with doubt that doesn't lead to mosques. It is a rough and rugged path, not taken by crowds, with very few travel companions. I am still walking on it and I have ended up in prison just as you did, master. But I am imprisoned by my family and my people. I'm a prisoner of the death which has overtaken this land. It is time for me to escape. My mother is on the opposite side asking you to keep me by her side and by yours, but she might not realize that this daily death will poison me if I stay here. (Antoon 169)

He decides to leave his mother with his sister because it is his chance to escape once and for all. He escapes death, war, violence and hoping to escape nightmares. He has deep wishes for this decision to succeed as all his previous ones have failed. He sacrifices this time by his mother, because:

Images and emotions crowded my inner domes: my heart and mind. All the statues I never sculpted and the drawings which remained sketches in my mind. Reem and her breast which was amputated, just as our love was. Ghayda' and her body which flew away like a dove. My father, Ammoury, and Hammoudy. The faces of the corpses I washed and shrouded on their way to the grave. Tears poured down and covered my face. I stayed in that open space, where I could cry without shame and without any explanation. My pain and wounds had a lung to breathe through. Forgive me Musa, son of Ja'far, for crying in your presence and on your day. I am a stranger among your visitors. I am a stranger like you and I am crying for myself. (Antoon 170)

Moreover, he feels that almost every encounter with war and death, leaves unhealed wound in his body and heart. It is also hard for him to accept that death has imprisoned him and he will never escape its grasp. Until his asylum request is rejected forcing him to return back to face it. This time Jawad is convinced that there is no way away from death: "If death is a postman, then I receive his letters every day," remarks Jawad. "I am the one who opens carefully the bloody and

torn envelopes. I am the one who washes them, who removes the stamps of death and dries and perfumes them” (Antoon 3). He is like the pomegranate tree doomed to drink the death’s water.

Finally I think Mbembe’s analysis of politics in “Necropolitics” can be applied to some of Antoons’ treatments of the Iraqi politics and wars. The text stresses the transformation of politics into the bios of the Iraqis and a transition from biopolitics into necropolitics, where death is the face of politics as Mbembe believes. Though Iraq is not a colony, its occupation was temporary to replace the government and end the rule of the Ba’athist.

Since the night of the war in March 2003 Iraq became a neo-colony, the old government is replaced by a new one under the control of the Coalition forces. The invasion comes as a call to liberate the country and help it have a new start, but “war, after all, is as much a means of achieving sovereignty as a way of exercising the right to kill” (Mbembe 12). This new moment is one of global mobility. An important feature of the age of global mobility is that military operations and the exercise of the right to kill are no longer the sole monopoly of states, and the “regular army” is no longer the unique modality of carrying out these functions” (Mbembe 31). Law is suspended and the Iraqi army was set free. The failure of the new administration and the Coalition force to preserve lives and control the political unrest bring forth deaths. The new Iraq is not the land where dreams come true, it’s a place where cars explode on their owners and where suicidal bombers push the button in the most crowded places. Mbembe believes that “peace is not necessarily the natural outcome of a colonial war”, and this can be resituated to the invasion to Iraq. Peace is replaced with death, and the politics of Iraq were left to the hands of some outsiders who came with Coalition forces. Therefore, death appeared to be the face of politics, or “Politics is therefore death that lives a human life” (Mbembe 15). This war showed that the recent Iraqi government is not objective and that “their central project is the generalized instrumentalization of human

existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (13) as Mbembe defines them. As all the members in the Iraqi Parliament are struggling over power, the process then of making better lives increases death. This sovereignty allows new, unfamiliar and unstoppable forms of death to consume the Iraqi citizenry. Every Iraqi individual has a share of that bloody feast. The horror they experienced is far to be recorded, as they stood on the borders of life and death. They are trapped in a place between life and death, where their right to live is not prior to their right to die. When Foucault’s concept of Bio-politics is used to show the shift by using power to protect humans and or save lives. This power, recently has turned back to its old usage, it doesn’t preserve lives anymore. Mbembe believes that the contemporary use of power flips Foucault’s couplet of letting live and making die, into a more violent form of power that induce fear that leads to making live and letting die. It is hard to understand this couplet in the contexts of power but Mbembe believes that politics explains it. He sees that where certain groups are exposed to conditions in which they are “kept alive but in a state of injury” (Mbembe 21). Within this necropolitical system of domination, conditions that are “obscene, vulgar and grotesque” (Mbembe 1992:1) become sanctioned for political ends.

The military occupation exercise a colonial sovereignty and the Iraqis:

experience a permanent condition of “being in pain”: fortified structures, military posts, and roadblocks everywhere; buildings that bring back painful memories of humiliation, interrogations, and beatings; curfews that imprison hundreds of thousands in their cramped homes every night from dusk to daybreak; soldiers patrolling the unlit streets, frightened by their own shadows; children blinded by rubber bullets; parents shamed and beaten in front of their families; soldiers urinating on fences, shooting at the rooftop water tanks just for fun, chanting loud offensive slogans, pounding on fragile tin doors to frighten the children, confiscating papers, or dumping garbage in the middle of a residential neighborhood; border guards kicking over a vegetable stand or closing borders at whim; bones broken; shootings and fatalities—a certain kind of madness.” (Mbembe 39)

Here, under the effect of politics, Mbembe believes the contemporary citizen has transferred into a “subject” through his reading of Hegel. A subject, that is different from an animal in its “confrontation with death”. Through this process of transformation and confrontation, the subject is “supposed [to] uphold the work of death”, where the “life of spirit lies”. “The life of the Spirit, he says [Hegel], is not that life which is frightened of death, and spares itself destruction, but that life which assumes death and lives with it” (Mbembe 14). There is then a direct correlation between, politics, death and the subject, the Iraqi as a subject, is controlled by death, which appears in the form of politics. The greater politics controls the subject, the great death appears. Iraq is divided and torn apart by the different militias that are trying to reach power. Mbembe stresses this fact saying:

In sum, colonies are zones in which war and disorder, internal and external figures of the political, stand side by side or alternate with each other. As such, the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of “civilization.” That colonies might be ruled over in absolute lawlessness stems from the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native.” (24)

Moreover, hunger and fear forces Iraqis either to escape or to be included in the different bloody militias “as a political category, populations are then disaggregated into rebels, child soldiers, victims or refugees, or civilians incapacitated by mutilation or simply massacred on the model of ancient sacrifices, while the “survivors,” after a horrific exodus, are connected in camps and zones of exception” (Mbembe 34). We will see the effect of some of the groups, organizations or militias that invaded Iraq and practice all the forms of brutality in the next chapter. The next chapter is going to handle more stories of pain and death in a different literary form which is short story. Short story is also an important literary production that is widely read in Iraq after the invasion as we will see in the next chapter.

4. STORIES OF DEATH, IMMIGRATION AND TERROR OF CONTEMPORARY

IRAQ

“Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here.” Sue Monk Kidd

In recent years, the short story has become an increasingly popular genre in Iraq, transforming dramatically in the wake of 2003 U.S. invasion. The short story appeared in Iraqi literature at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Haitham Bahoora believes *Al-Riwāya al- 'iqāziyya* (1919, The Awakening Story) by Sulaymān Fayḍī's (1885-1951) began the movement to narrate reality through short fiction. He believes that every writer tries to reflect some of reality in his work. Bahoora further notices that the genre enjoyed a peak “By the end of the 1940s and into the 1950s” when “leftist and nationalist Iraqi political movements opposing the monarchy had reached a critical mass”. Writers who were part of the movements turned to short stories and started “crafting increasingly complex and innovative realist short stories” in an attempt to depict the real lives of Iraqis and to produce texts that are “connected to social and economic conditions” (Cited in Bahoora 10, Maḥdī 35). Therefore, themes of poverty, war, hunger, death, torture, and violence appear in their writings and speeches. Their works sparked “frequent popular protests and rebellions” among their supporters, leading to “the censorship and imprisonment of many Iraqi writers who had become increasingly vocal advocates of anti-colonial and anti-monarchical sentiment” (Bahoora 9). Despite the clampdown on political writers, they continued to produce texts that dealt with urgent issues and continued to “publish their works, often in serial form, in newspapers and magazines” (Aḥmad 105-6, Cited in Bahoora 1). In modern Iraq and during the time of the Ba'athists from 1968-2003, the country witnessed many wars during which every intellectual resource was directed to support the governing regime

and those wars. In literature, there was only war literature with fiction and poetry focused on themes of heroism and martyrdom. The revelatory power of the short story was silenced.

The 2003 war brought an end to any form of political stability, inaugurating a period of cataclysmic political, social and cultural changes. As these changes occurred, untold stories from the Ba'athist period met with circumstances nearly beyond the capacity of linguistic description. With censorship of the Ba'ath party over, all artistic fields including literature flourished under newfound freedom. This important factor allowed short story writers to address sensitive and urgent issues, for the first time, fearlessly. Writers could talk about politics, religion, cultural and social life without any fear of being imprisoned or persecuted. Thus, the product of post-2003 literature is "politically engaged, narrating a range of Iraqi experiences, reconstructing and rewriting the Iraqi past as well as engaging the difficult conditions of contemporary Iraq". Form met content with authors "often using experimental literary styles to portray a turbulent and uncertain national condition" (Bahoora 17). Post 2003 Iraqi writers narrated different tragedies and historical moments that had been previously ignored, hidden and silenced. Through their works, violence searched for its language.

In this chapter, I will analyze texts by Hassan Blasim and Lu'ay Hamza Abbas, two of the prominent Iraqi fiction writers who illustrate images of violence, death and war in very different ways. They represent pictures of accumulations of years of war, pain, violence and terror that the invasion set off in the streets. They are marked by the introduction of the gothic into Iraqi short fiction.

4.1 **Hassan Blasim and the gruesomeness of the human self**

When asked about the best literary form to describe what happens in Iraq, Blasim says:

Truthfully I don't know what the appropriate form or style is for writing about what happened and what is happening in Iraq. In general I am not drawn to what many Iraqi writers are writing about the situation in Iraq, a poetic and mournful language about the tragedy of blood! Violence is an experience at once nightmarish, horrifying and unreal. In Iraq violence has been practiced over the past 50 years with severity and savagery; it has been a chain of painful and peculiar nightmares. (Hassan Blasim: Online Interview)

Hassan Blasim is one of the contemporary Iraqi writers and filmmakers who tries to broadcast Iraqi issues to the world. He escaped Iraq well before 2003, leaving behind the governmental censorship and literary control that initially hindered his mission as an artist. In order to start fresh and find discourse to articulate, reality in its ugliest form, Blasim rebelled against the literary standard and tradition that is represented by the use of formal Arabic language, and more academic vocabularies. Thus he leaned on the colloquial and informality because “we need to express the disaster of our lives in the Arab world in a language that is bold, up-to-date and not afraid of grammar or of Arabic's sanctity” (Daniel O'Connell). He wanted to focus more on the sufferings of his fellow citizens and the surreal life in his homeland. Therefore, his short story collection *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq* is written in colloquial Arabic to capture the deadly place that is his Iraq:

Better to say that “The Corpse Exhibition” takes Mr. Blasim from pulpy, claustrophobic two-handers about easy death to well-plotted, blackly comic meditations on the difficulty of survival. It's unclear in what order he wrote these stories, but their sequence imparts a mounting novelistic power. As the protagonists evolve from teenage gangsters and hit men into journalists and, eventually, refugees, the structures of their stories grow ever more coordinated and shapely.” (An Iraq Blasted Open, Sketched From the Inside By David Kipen)

The stories deal with contemporary issues that Blasim sees and believes that the outside world couldn't see. His fiction has become popular overseas, especially in Europe, where *The Guardian's* Robin Yassin-Kassab called him "perhaps the best writer of Arabic fiction alive" (cited in Brian Van Reet). That is because Blasim avoids narrating for the sake of documenting reality only, he emphasizes the absurdity of political violence as well. Subsequently, his book's gothic stories fall into many layers of cruelty and brutality in a place and time that makes no sense. When asked if his work was magical realism, Blasim stated, "not magical realism," but "nightmarish realism. Horrifying hallucination" (Lydia Beardmore). In another interview, Blasim comments on using a traditional device, "the oral storyteller has often incorporated the fantastical to assert the horrors of reality or make it memorable or stick."

The stories address Iraq over the past decades, covering the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the country's long embargo up to the American led invasion and its aftermath. As such, the stories can be understood to be a history of modern Iraq. What is striking is how the stories, as one reviewer notes, "at first (like a) gesture toward the absurd until you're gripped by the awareness that this might be our world Blasim is describing, one he tells us is built to have more than one level" (Brian Van Reet). The reader will realize the world we are dealing with here has different levels of cruelty, absence of humanity, gruesomeness, and selfishness. Therefore he chooses colloquial Arabic, which is easier to express the reality and easier to understand by the contemporary reader.

Though his book appeared first in Arabic, it didn't gain public attention until translated into English by Jonathan Wright. English speaking readers and especially the journalists put new insight to it. Their literary criticism and interviews with Blasim assured to him that translation is the best way to get the Western audience to engage in the Iraqi case and understand the other side

of the war. Nevertheless, the stories address readers around the world who want to hear of the daily intervention of horror with every day speech. Iraqi readers in particular started to engage in the themes of the stories because of their uniqueness. The new insight to images of blood, loss of lives and many untold stories that show the real depth of the crisis.

Blasim, in his texts, examines regular Iraqis in times of crisis. He decides to discuss their deeds and as critic O'Connell notes, "Blasim's stories are peopled by the dead who've come back to tell their tales to catcalls and derision, jinnis who feast upon dead Russian flesh, refugees and men who become unwilling terrorists in bathroom stalls, and prophets and madmen" (Daniel O'Connell). He shows particular interest in the world of criminality, in which his characters practice all forms of murder, take advantage of religious arguments or participate in extremist organizations as in "The Corpse Exhibition". Crimes that a natural mind cannot imagine, but the characters plan their catastrophic actions simply as in "The Army Newspaper".

All of the writers in this study focus on the corpse with each relating to it at a different stage. Saadawi's (Hadi) collects the body parts to stitch them into complete corpses. Antoon's (Jawad) shrouds them and sends them to their final journey. And Blasim wakes up those corpses to interrogate them and give them the chance to tell their stories. *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories* are stories of corpse revival for the sake of truth and/or details. The text doesn't deal with war stories, but instead is "a book of stories about how war worms its way into every aspect of life" (Van Reet). Through this collection, Blasim differently stages violent examples of Iraq before and after the invasion. He emphasizes that Iraqi wars gave rise to militias and figures who abused power in one way or another. He tries to see the effect of war on people who couldn't resist or escape its impact. He tells stories of those who live under the effect of the war and of those who

indulge in the darker instincts of the killers to achieve fame, money or to protect themselves or others as in “The Iraqi Christ”.

Among Blasim’s main concerns are those who escape Iraq seeking peace and freedom in the outside world. He himself is an immigrant who experiences miseries on his way to freedom. In “Carlos Fuentes”, Blasim shows the effect of a new culture on immigrants. Moreover, it reflects how freedom and peace aren’t enough to delete the past and provides it’s victim new beginnings. In the story, Salim Abdul Husain escapes from Iraq to the Netherlands. There, he changes his name into Carlos Fuentes and tries his best to be the perfect citizen, stating, “give me a country that treats me with respect, so that I can worship it all my life and pray for it” (Blasim 191). He finds a perfect wife and both settle down. These are attempts to forget Iraq, his name and his work in the “municipality in the cleaning department,. . . to clear up in the aftermath of explosions” (Ibid 185) as a garbage man, as people called him. Everything works perfectly, until dreams start to visit him targeting his new national identity. For example, he dreams of himself speaking the Iraqi dialect and unable to communicate in Dutch. He sees kids making fun of his name in words aimed at the bullied Hussein he is trying to escape being, “they were shouting after him. . . Carlos the coward, Carlos the sissy, Carlos the silly billy.” The nightmares continue, no matter how hard he tries to escape them, no matter how closely he follows the books’ instructions for a dreamless night. He sees himself placing bombs in the middle of the city, shooting people including children in Iraq, and shooting himself as Salim Abdul Husain not as Fuentes: “Salim was standing naked next to the window, holding a broom stained with blood. With a trembling hand Fuentes aimed his rifle at Salim’s head. Salim began to smile and repeated in derision, “Salim the Dutchman, Salim the Indian, Salim the Pakistani, Salim the Nigerian... Fuentes’s nerves snapped and he panicked. He let out a resounding scream and started to spray Salim Abdul Husain with bullets, but Salim

jumped out the window and not a single bullet hit him” (Blasim 195). Fuentes himself jumped out of the window and ended his life. Blasim here sheds light on some of the aspects that force the Iraqis to immigrate and on the immigrant’s mentality after living in exiles.

“The Hole,” on the other hand, features a man being chased by armed men falling into a well-like hole to find a Jinni from the Abbasid time who used to work as “a teacher a writer and inventor”. The Jinni suggested lighting Baghdad with lanterns and the Caliph liked the idea but the thieves hated it. They followed him and he fell down the hole. He is reading minds and telling stories from another war. Beside the djinn, there is “a body of a soldier and there was an old rifle nearby” in the hole. The soldier was “Russian . . . from an ancient war” whose legs were ripped of his body and whose flesh provides food for the Jinni. The story ends with the next victim, a girl, who has fallen into the hole from a future where humans are at war with robots. The cruel irony of the repetition of history is emphasized through magical elements. “This story is an example of these literary devices at its most powerful, making the mundane into something surreal and symbolic” (Lydia Beardmore 1). The successive fall of victims into this hole emphasizes how Iraq’s wars know no end, and the past present and the future are full of wars.

4.1.1 “The Corpse Exhibition”

First in the collection, this titular story tells of those who work in the militias and are responsible for killing and terrorizing civilians daily. While Iraq is not the explicit setting for the story, Blasim has implied as much in multiple interviews. It is a story of violence and about violence experiences that Blasim described in an interview with “The Independent” as “at once nightmarish, horrifying and unreal. In Iraq violence has been practiced over the past fifty years with severity and savagery; it has been a chain of painful and peculiar nightmares” (Lydia

Beardmore 2). Therefore, violence is Blasim's first instrument to play out the miseries of Iraq. "The Corpse Exhibition" is a seven page story that is full of destructive images of violence that are hard to ignore. It shows how Iraq turned into a version of hell after the invasion where chaos reigned and the absence of law invaded every corner of the country.

The narrator (the trainee) of this story is being interviewed by the trainer as he applies for a certain job. The trainer works for an agency that is responsible for killing civilians and exhibiting their bodies in public. The trainer does all the talking in the story, asks questions and answers them himself in an attempt to explain the importance of their job. The job consists of choosing "clients", then inventing ways of killing them and exhibiting their bodies in public. The agents of the group, including the trainer, should have artistic ability in exhibiting the beauty of their victims. They should submit a proposal of their method of killing to a group of specialists who encourage the trainees to use their imagination to dig deep into their dark side and perform their ugliest methods of killing. The trainee, on his part, needs to talk with his trainer in certain way and follow certain steps. He explains, "you absolutely may not write to me about work matters by e-mail or call me on the phone. You will write all your questions on a special form that I will provide you with" (Blasim 3). The trainee, however, receives his "payment in full" before he starts, but cannot quit afterwards because "there are strict conditions for that and if the management agrees to sever relations with you, you would have to undergo many tests, which could last a long time" (Blasim 4). The trainee listens patiently to stories of agents who work for this group who use code names like Agent Deaf, Satan's Knife, and the Nail and their methods of killing civilians and exhibiting their bodies in public. The trainer defines the group as "professional artists" and not

terrorists whose aim is to bring down as many victims as possible in order to intimidate others, nor even crazy killers working for the sake of money. We have nothing to do with the fanatical Islamist groups or the intelligence agency of some nefarious government or any other kind of nonsense (Blasim 4).

The trainer emphasizes that there is no place for feelings or beliefs in the job. Agent Nil lost his life because he believed in heavenly justice and refused to kill. To accomplish his mission, he tried to steal a body from the morgue but was caught by the mortician and killed. At the end of the interview the trainer stabs the trainee with a knife because he suspects his nature and inability to be a “genius.”

This story is a representation of the chaotic life in the Iraqi street after the invasion. It is not chaotic because the street is overcrowded with cars, but rather because some streets are empty of their pedestrians who are unable to go outside. Iraq is a place where law is absent and the political situation is unstable, therefore it “presents one of the century’s rare opportunities” for a group of killers to flourish. The group’s acts of violence accordingly are different from the “terrorists” or the “Islamists” whose aim is to kill. The group’s aim is to exhibit their art because, as the trainer explains to the trainee, “everybody you finish off is a work of art waiting for you to add the final touch, so that you can shine like a precious jewel amid the wreckage of this country” (Blasim 5). In addition to personal fame, the group benefits from this work because every displayed corpse enables them to grow in creativity. The flourishing of such groups increase the disruption in the street and decrease peace. In such a manner, Blasim stresses the growth of violence in the Iraq streets.

He also shows a different image of art in the times of war. That art is based on violent world, full of death, pain and fear. The trainer ignores the amount of pain and fear he and his group inflict on their clients. The agents’ methods of inventing terror allow them to grow prosperous as well as famous. Violence here appears verbal and dramatic. With no law or order, Iraqis live with groups of “professional artists” who consider the destruction of a human life a work of art. This group is a life destroyer, not preserver, and therefore their art is absurd. The Iraqi street is perfect

for them because it is a perfect place for absurdity. A place that is full of groups of professional artists who claim that killing civilians is a work of art. Their artful work is based on deaths that run in every corner in the Iraqi street. The group's art on the other hand is absurd, because the value of art lies in its ability to produce beauty and create things not based on destruction. The destruction here is not of color or paper but of flesh and blood. While some of the terrorists' explosions turns the human body into a bloody mist, this group values the body. Therefore, they tend to kill it in a way that allows them to create art out of it which is an absurd act. When such absurdities mount, the result is a world with no sense or mercy. Blasim believes that in such groups it is hard to find mercy. Those groups of criminals also consider their work valuable but not violent. They value the body and as long as Iraq supports them by providing them with bodies they are staying to complete the work.

This group also likes "concision, simplicity and the striking image" in their work and is looking for agents that can deal with the human body as art material. When, the Nail, one of the agents, tries to trick the group by reusing a dead corpse because he didn't want to kill a human being, believing in "some creator monitoring all our deeds," he is terminated even though he proposed a grisly death to apply to his victim. The Nail had proposed an exhibition for his corpse in a restaurant as an "authentic work of art." The Nail has human feelings but still wants to participate in the process of terrorizing others because it supports him financially. Afraid of the heavenly justice, he decided to skip the sin of killing a human to steal a body and exhibit it. Hence, the Nail looked in the hospital's morgues for his corpses. The morgue was "overflowed with corpses from those stupid acts of terrorism" (Blasim 8). There, the Nail found his prey "a child who had been beheaded along with the rest of his family for sectarian reason. The body was clean and the cut at the neck was as neat as a piece of torn paper" (Blasim 9). This poor child looks

perfect for the Nail's plan and will be a perfect piece of art once exhibited to the public in a bowl filled with blood and eyes from other family members. Unfortunately, the mortician caught the Nail and ruins his plans.

For the trainer, who doesn't mention any of his own work, the proposal is genuine, not like the classism of other agents who wants to "paint the client's body parts and hang them from invisible threads, the heart in dark blue, the intestines in green, the liver and the testicles yellow". He says that it is not a work of art because it's not inventive. Neither is the work of another agent who proposed "cutting off the client's limbs and hanging them from electrical wires in the slum neighborhood, is the height of creativity and invention". The failure for the trainer is that his trainees don't understand "the poetry of simplicity" (Blasim 5). What does "simplicity" mean in a work of art that is based on exhibiting tortured humans? "Simplicity" works alongside "genius" in the method of another agent, "The Deaf". The Deaf exhibits a body of a women and her son in public: "she was naked and fat and her child also naked, was sucking at her left breast, he put the woman under a dead palm tree in the central reservation of a busy street. There was no trace of a wound or a bullet on the woman's body or on the baby" (Blasim 6).

That work of art from the exhibitor's point of view is beautiful because it is unique and Iraq is the perfect proving ground for uniqueness because it provides the group the opportunity to practice their work. The trainee who decided to join the group is aware of the world outside the organization, but is not sure that this group contributes to that world. He sees death in its ugliest form and seems astonished by the lecture of the trainer. The trainer is not hallucinating, he talks confidently and is proud of his group. The trainer is talking about the destruction of a human life, of losing a person and ruining the lives of others. We saw in Antoon's text the effect of death on Jawad. All Iraqis, to the agents are proposed clients, which is basically how he and his group see

them. There is no value then in the Iraqis' lives, their value lies in their death and the way their bodies are exhibited. The agent is right when he distinguishes his group from the terrorists because they value their victims. It is the quality of their work that matters, not the quantity. For that reason their work should be highly appreciated.

This story is short in pages, but is rich with images of pain, death and terror. It presents a perfect image of contradictions. It shows the inside world of the group; educational, erudite and the agents or trainers are provide careful tutelage. It also shows how generous the group is and that they pay in advance. At the same time, this group has turned the outside world into a nightmare. The outside world is a place that is full of clients for the agent, it is a rich source for artful exhibition. Indeed the outside world is a place full of ugliness, pain, fear and violence.

Iraq post-2003 is a place where characters like the mortician in "The Corpse Exhibition" play a vital role along with the corpse terminator. The mortician's work flourishes because he is paid "to patch together the bodies of their children and other relatives who were torn apart in explosions and random killing" (Blasim 9). The mortician is an artist of another kind, he fixes what the trainer's group ruins. He works patiently to restore the natural beauty of the victims as much as he can, he helps the dead to look peaceful. He spends his life in a place full of death where he can deal with all the signs of violence to heal them before sending them to people like Jawad to wash and shroud them. He, at the same time, doesn't allow people like the Nail or The Wahtsitsname to steal bodies. He is the guard of the world of the dead with his own philosophy. The moment he catches the Nail, he injects him with a paralyzing drug and says, "Ooh, my dear, Ooh, my friend, there is something stranger than death—to look at the world, which is looking at you, but without any gesture or understanding or even purpose, as though you and the world are united in blindness, like silence and loneliness" (Blasim 10). He then exhibits the Nail's body on

a platform in front of the Ministry of Justice. The mortician is the same person who is “in charge of the truth and creativity department in the institution” (Blasim 10).

In spite of all this horror, the trainer assures the trainee that he will “be able to preserve with the work and enjoy it”. The trainer is also given another form of enjoyment linked to the beauty of art during the time of war. The agents enjoy their work because they compete to produce the best work that grants them a promotion and a monetary reward. This indeed shows the absurdity of the group in general and how they enjoy and see beauty in killing others and creating art out of their bodies. Such groups violate the dignity of a person in his life and after his death. The different layers of brutality appear smooth and easy from the trainer’s speech, which shows how used to such scene he is. His only virtue is that he and his group are not targeting crowded places and seeking the death of victims in such daily attacks as the other terrorists do. The group is picking clients based on advanced study and research therefore their mission should be accomplished beautifully.

4.1.2 “The Killer and the Compass”

Blasim’s “The Killer and the Compass” unfolds as a very bizarre tale of terror before the invasion that shows how violence’s reign over Iraq going back at least fifty years and forms the basis of law. Some characters relate to violence and induce fear in order to have god-like control through their own administration of law. It is they who are unleashed onto the street by the American invasion and who have terrorized Iraqis in the run-up. In this Ba’athist environment, Iraqis spy on and torture each other in a brutal realistic world.

The story starts in a world where “people who are frightened will give you everything”. This is Abu Hadid’s philosophy as he advises his younger brother Mahdi. Abu Hadid is one of

those people who works for their own interest. His philosophy in life is to live like a god, not by protecting or bestowing mercy on others; but instead by terrorizing them and abusing them. He wants people to fear him and obey him without asking for anything in return. As the brothers stroll around some wretched neighborhoods in the middle of the night. Abu Hadid continues as he drinks arak, “you have to learn how to make yourself God in this world, so that people lick your ass while you shit down their throats” (Blasim 13). Mahdi wanders through the neighborhoods and sees their inhabitants who seem awake and waiting for their God-like visit. The brothers stop by the house of Umm Hanan, the prostitutes of the neighborhood and her three daughters. Abu Hadid “slept with Umm Hanan” and then “fucked her youngest daughter”. Then he asked Umm Hanan to ‘fuck me”. Abu Hadid pleases himself then takes some money and sets forth on another mission. Mahdi is still watching, learning and enjoying himself as well. They then reached then the house of Abu Mohammed’s, the mechanic, where Abu Hadid kicks the door with his feet. Abu Mohammed the “gerbil who swallowed the watermelon” isn’t a decent man. Still, the sight of Abu Hadid in his door astonishes him. Abu Hadid “whispered a few words in the mechanic’s ear, and the mechanic’s face turned even darker than usual”. Closer to the morning, the two meet a new friend of Abu Hadid, Murad Harba who takes them in his car to a deserted park. During that ride, Murad tells the story of the compass. Murad met a young Pakistani child years ago, in Iran, when they tried to smuggle into Europe. Waheed, the Pakistani child, had a compass with him that his father gave it to him. The compass doesn’t give literal directions as much as it indicates danger. Waheed could read the danger and, therefore, ended his life one day before the Iranian police found the rest of them. The police put them in jail before sending them back to their countries. The story is meant to entertain Mahdi before their arrival at their destination. Their destination is a miserable park with couple of trees where Abu Hadid asks Mahdi to dig a hole with Murad to bury one of their

victims. Mahdi says that Abu Hadid has lived his life in that matter until one of those victims turns him out to the police. It is Johnny the barber: “The night it happened Abu Hadid was fucking Johnny’s pretty brown daughter on the roof of the house. The police surrounded him and shot him in the leg. They executed him a week later” (Blasim 17).

The story shows how Iraq descended into chaos and madness during the time of the Ba’ath party. People terrorize each other and when one dies the other takes the lead. It shows how different figures acquire power and raise themselves to the level of gods by their abuse of power. Abu Hadid lived all his life as a god and this legalizes the use of violence for his survival, fulfills his sexual desire illegally, take money illegally, and killing others illegally. He is deviating the state’s law trying to make his law. Being a god allows Abu Hadid survive all the misfortunes he foists on the civilians and nothing happens to him. Moreover, he challenged the Ba’ath rule and tried to create his own law based on personal interests. He uses violence to create law and lives like sovereigns of his own state. Blasim mentions the role of the Ba’athists briefly, in this story, but Benjamin’s theory illuminates the operation he describes. Walter Benjamin in his “Critique of Violence” mentions two types of violence that are applicable here. He thinks that for the state to establish its law, it needs to use violence that is defined as “law making violence”. To preserve violence there should be law because “violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens not by the ends it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law”. On the other hand for the state to protect its law it uses violence that is called “law-preserving violence”. The relation between law and violence is important for him to preserve justice which is the third element in this matrix. The state then is able to use violence through its institutions like the police, army and different other organizations to set justice all over its citizens. Both forms of violence are essential to the existence of the state and therefore their use is justified. In the light of the different stories of *The Corpse*

Exhibition, texts that we are examining here we see a state, law, violence and organizations. The Ba'athists are part of the Iraqi state's institutions to preserve law before the American led invasion in 2003.

Through the use of violence and fear, Abu Hadid is able to grow stronger and that is part of what Benjamin mentions "law-making is power-making, assumption of power, and to that extent an immediate manifestation of violence" (248). Though his night tour Abu Hadid visits his people, those who accept his violence because it is inevitable. He is bestowing his law over them to gain power. Every person he abuses increases his power and sovereignty. He is a god only by acting violently and being able to curse people.

According to Benjamin, the state establishes law but its application varies because some already acting like sovereigns. Those sovereigns like Abu Hadid gain power based on their ability to suck the power of the scared. That ability also allows those sovereigns to challenge the state's law and create their own. The state's law therefore is applied to people like Abu Rihab who supports the Daaw Party, and excludes Abu Hadid, because that law protect the Ba'ath Party and its people:

Law in the classical bourgeois sense cannot rule the Ba'athist world because there is no reciprocity in a fear-ridden environment. Moreover, the law is at best gradualist in its workings, predicated on the idea of the unchanging individual who remains responsible for his action though time. Ideal Ba'ath individual transcend the law because their identity and behavior are totally fused with their beliefs. The law is secondary at best, and as citizens they cannot escape the logic of punishments as torture any more than they can escape the endless flurry of edicts and commands that shower down upon their daily lives (Makiya 68).

Law and justice are often mentioned in Ba'ath speeches and are alleged to be applied equally on the nation. Unfortunately, the moment the police officer went to sleep Abu Hadid and his like grow prosperous and their violent acts flourish. Mahdi notices how his brother is able to

start a discussion and ends it convincingly. In that journey they visit a man who treats them kindly, but after a moment of silence Abu Hadid, who is staring at a tank of fish, asks if the fish are happy. The man replies “as long as they eat and drink and swim, they’re fine”. Then Abu Hadid asks if they drink water, and refuses to accept any reply from the man who insists that they can in one way or another. Abu Hadid then jumps over the man “like a hungry tiger,” pulls a small knife from his pocket puts it close to the man’s eye, and starts shouting hysterically in his face, “Answer you cocksucker! how can fish drink salt water?” (Blasim 18). Abu Hadid keeps on repeating the same question and cursing the man until he “suck a cucumber in the man’s ass” then leaves. Abu Hadid represents the missing law when he walks from one neighborhood to another terrorizing its inhabitants without being arrested. He also shows the state of waste the Iraqis lived for years before the 2003 Americans’ led-invasion, when such a killer, an abuser, and criminal is able to stroll through the night freely to teach his brother how to abuse power. The people he is terrorizing are not better than him, people including Umm Hanan the prostitute, who is offering a sinful service and violating the law. Abu Mohammed the mechanic, who tried to make his work grow when asking Mahdi and his friends to puncturing the tires of the cars in the neighborhood. Finally Murad Harba Abu Hadid’s friend who helps them burry a fearful man. People of those neighborhood are all scared of Abu Hadid because of his abuse of power and his ability to challenge the state’s law because one time he “threw a hand grenade at the party office when the comrades executed someone who had evaded military conscription”. He is a man who has “his own private demons” therefore he doesn’t distinguish between right and wrong or “good and evil”.

Such acts are meant to teach Mahdi how to be frightful and to scare people not with his physical features but with his character. Saadawi in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* depends on monstrous creatures like the Whatsitsname to establish law and achieve justice in the chaotic Iraq.

Blasim rejects the logic of magical realism, instead tracks the humans establishment of law. Figures like Abu Hadid, Mahdi and even Harba are humans, not stitched up corpses, but they act like powerful creatures because of their ability to induce fear. They are prosperous like sovereigns (the Ba'athists as well) with their ability to control people and decide their futures. Both work on violating the innocents' world aggressively, insulting their sanctity, humiliating their dignity and abusing their virginity. The Whatsitsname justifies his acts of terror by his desire to avenge the victims that constitute his body. Abu Hadid's logic is to scare people and see fear through their eyes as a way to possess them. While the monster aspires to be the "ideal citizen", he has a mission to help Iraqis and get rid of the terrorists. Abu Hadid declares himself a merciless God to the people of those neighborhoods and commits all the sins during his visits. He thinks he is the ideal citizen as well but his mission is to live prosperously served by people who appreciate his power. The compass of the story is not his, he is the killer only. He doesn't need it, because he is the danger himself. He is more like the Ba'athists, the human sovereigns, than monsters of stitched up corpses. They turn Iraq into a "republic of fear" as defined by Kanan Makiya

in Saddam Hussain's reorganization, the boss became a faceless party bureaucrat. The new system was less brittle, more complex and nuanced; instead of one big chief, it embraced a whole hierarchy of bosses controlling those below and keeping an every watchful eye on those above. The result was virtually absolute control by the party through its own intelligence and the formalization of a system of spying on spies. . .The party has consumed the state rather than the reverse (16).

Makiya shows how the organization of the Ba'ath party worked through a net of spies. Blasim barely mentions it here through the story of the Daawa supporters. Abu Rihab had contacts with people supporting Daawa party and "after a year of torture and interrogation in the vaults of the security, he was branded traitor and shot" (Blasim 15). His family carries the shame of their traitor father and should leave the country to where they belong, which is Iran as it is the home of

the Daawa party. Blasim refers to this issue as he emphasizes the idea of those who have no political or religious beliefs. The Iraqis already live in fear through the day, which allows people like Abu-Hadid to scare them even more through the night. This story in particular talks about the power of fear, how to use it and how to lose it. The more they acquire this power, the more violent they turn. After some digging, Abu Hadid and Murad:

took a man, bound and gagged out of the trunk and dragged him along the ground to the hole. My brother told me to come close and look into the man's eyes. The look of fear I saw is stamped in my memory as though with a branding iron. Abu Hadid kicked the man in the back, and the man slumped into the hole. We shoveled soil on top of him and leveled the ground well. (Blasim 23)

That look of fear in the victim's eyes increased Mahdi's power. Mahdi now knows what it takes to be powerful as "a lion" or a "god in this world". Those victims counted as scapegoats for the god like "followers or crybabies willing to die of hunger or suffer in his name" (Blasim 13). Abu Hadid's reputation grants his family power as well. When the brothers stroll through the night they reach a neighborhood that is new to Mahdi. There, he and Abu Hadid visits a man who treats them kindly. Mahdi recalls a memory of a school mate who lived in this neighborhood. The kid had beaten Mahdi once, when the kid's father figured out that his son had troubles with Abu Hadid's brother. He came to school asking Mahdi to "beat up his son". Mahdi thinks that "people were scared of my brother's senseless brutality. His reputation for ruthless delinquency spread throughout the city". At the same time people loved him because he "defended people against the cruelty of the ruling party. . .[he] didn't distinguish between good and evil. He had his own private demons" (Blasim 17). Abu Hadid lives his life on his own, respects no law or religion. He represents those insurgents who create daily, relentless, and inescapable violence. When he is happy he will go from one house to another sleeping with prostitutes or spreading terror over

people or simply attacking them. When he is drunk “he multitudes the face of some wretched vegetable seller” (Blasim 17).

Blasim’s fictional killers operate on “artistic principles, not political or religious” (Brian van Reet 2). Therefore, we see Abu Hadid doesn’t represent any political party or militia, because one time he “threw a hand grenade at the party office when the comrades executed someone who had evaded military conscription” (Blasim 17). He tries to defend those powerless people, that he already sucked their power.

4.1.3 “The Iraqi Christ”

In “The Iraqi Christ” Ali, the narrator, tells the story of his Christian friend Daniel after they have met in the other world, the world of dead. Daniel is an Iraqi Christian, a soldier, and a citizen who refuses to leave Iraq in spite of all the challenges he faces daily. His friends call him “chew-gum Christ” as he always chews gum, and that for Ali is like “an energy source recharging the battery that powered the screen in his brain” (Blasim 94). For others he is “a force of nature” because he is able to predicate danger “in absurd wars such as this one, Daniel’s gift is a lifesaver”. During the war against Kuwait he saved the lives of many soldiers as he senses danger and leaves the place. His fellow soldiers moves with him and that grants them their lives as well because they eluded their attackers several times in the battlefield. Daniel tries to join the air force because he wants to work with radars, but his application is refused because his father was a Communist. Therefore, he voluntarily applies for the medical unit of the army. He is a peaceful man with special a power. He is supposed to meet the Iraqi “dictator” who is obsessed with knowing the future. Therefore he will meet with people like “magician, the occult, and people with prodigious power” like Daniel. He need to know what is going to happen before it is happening to act properly.

Daniel never meets the Iraqi president and always considers himself a normal person with powers possessed by people over time. He wishes that he can save the world with that power rather than use it for personal interests.

He sees lots of deaths but refuses to leave Iraq although his whole family has left, leaving him and his mother alone. He spends his time at home taking care of his disabled mother and refuses to rejoin the army in spite of Ali's request. One Sunday he takes his mother to a favorite restaurant where they can enjoy some favorite dishes. There a young man sits next to them and shows him an explosive belt he is wearing. That young man asks Daniel to follow him to the bathroom. There, the man pulls a gun and threatens Daniel to switch places. In return the man will take care of the Daniel's mother. The Christ has no other option but to sacrifice himself for the sake of his mother. The man then assures that someone is filming the explosion, if he withdraws he will kill the old lady. Therefore, he decides on accomplishing this mission. When the man left the "Christ fell to his knee. . . he opened the bathroom door and crawled into the restaurant. Someone met him at the door and ran back shouting. A suicide bomber a suicide bomber! . . . Christ saw that his mother's chair was empty, and he pressed the button" (Blasim 100-1).

In this story Blasim points out two important themes. For the first time in the collection he mentions the Iraqi president "the dictator" as a person interested in magic and witchcraft. Unfortunately, that interest didn't help him or his country that suffered wars for years. To the Christ, the human is most important creature and he wish that his talent could serve his country because "how can I reconcile my private life with my awareness that a world is collapsing in front of my eyes" (Blasim 96). Therefore he blames the president and then the American invasion which appears as a destructive power. Both give rise to sectarianism and terrorism that invaded every corner of Iraq. The Iraqi Christ responded to his friend's request to rejoin the army after 2003 by

rejection. Daniel replies that “he hated the dictator, but he would not contribute to an army under the auspices of the occupier”. Daniel and many other Iraqis refuse to work in the army after the invasion because it was under the control of the American leader in Iraq. Ali, Daniel’s friend, joined the army out of need for work, but is killed by it. Ali says

I was killed by friendly fire, myself. We were on a joint patrol with the American forces after the invasion. Someone opened fire on us from a house in the village. The Americans responded hysterically, thinking we had opened fire on them. I was shoot three times in the head. (Blasim 99)

“The Iraqi Christ” shows as well how death is routinized in Iraq as it depicts a serious crisis in contemporary Iraq. It shows when there is no law to control violence there will be terrorists walking in the streets wearing explosive belts and targeting local crowded places. The absence of law after 2003 allows such figures to spread, creating political disruption in Iraq. Simultaneously, the daily attacks change a lot in the Iraqi cultural scene. It give rise to a new kind of language that is used by the Iraqis in stressing things or pointing to urgent topics. The language includes vocabularies that started to be part of the Iraqi colloquial. Words like explosive, bomb, blast, missile and many more appeared even in text messages. Some of those vocabularies appear in a restaurant menu like “one explosive, mind blowing, gut wrenching Kebab. One fragmentation stew. Two ballistic rice and beans” (Blasim 98). This use could be intended add excitement to the menu, it also emphasis the ease of death, as well as the ability of the Iraqis to live along side the crises surrounding them.

4.2 *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq are Stories of Surreal Death*

In this collection Blasim does not narrate real stories, or documents facts. His characters do not act under the effect of shock, rather they are beyond trauma, studying the effect of the event

after responding to reality. While other characters like Jawad are unwilling to express their fear, or sadness and or like Hadi who hides his relationship to the creation of the monster; Blasim's characters are all willing to share their stories, their madness, brutality and sufferings. They, as Gina Rodriguez says, "share a need to reconcile the surreal experience of war with the everyday" (2). They are trying to reflect their misery in one way or another because they need to express it. Therefore he seems to avoid mentioning the Americans and the destruction they brought to the country, or the "dictator" as he calls him, focusing more on the destruction the Iraqis brought to their nation. He is more concerned with pain, ambition and the absurdity of the common man. He is showing how unhealthy the Iraqi society is. Their exposure to violence and encounter with death create fearless humans. They also costumed their daily life and adjust it to accept death like the Daniel the Christ, or Abu Mohammed the gerbil. He also stresses that war is not the main factor in creating this brutality because war itself is only "part of the tableau". Wars happen in the frontline, but the Iraqi streets witnessed different form of cruelty. Rodriguez assures that

War is something that happens, literally, "over there." Blasim's characters have no "over there." Violence is in their day-to-day. Suicide bombers, executions, exile—these qualify as the quotidian. And so, if a story is about the out-of-the-ordinary, how perfect that Blasim's stories should focus on the truly extraordinary: the over-the-top, the unbelievable, the magical. When everyone has a war story, how else to stand out from the crowd?

She agrees with Blasim that the cruelty of the Iraqis are the product of the different acts of terror through sectarianism, terrorism and the different militias. Those militias transform the country into a wild place where law is inapplicable. Because Iraqis treated law differently before and after the invasion but mainly with disrespect and ignorance. Iraq before the invasion was governed by the Ba'athists, proclaimed that they wanted to produce a new strong and united Iraq. That intention ended with a net of spies and anyone who refused to join the Ba'ath labeled a traitor.

Abu Hadid wrought havocs through this setting for eight years until the state decides to put an end to his “rampage”. The state is justified to use violent against him to protect its law and end his law. Therefore the state uses law preserving violence to end Abu Hadid’s personal law making violence. The two forms of violence remain in working interchangeably in Iraq after the death of Abu Hadid, because he passes his philosophy to Mahdi who is now a new god.

After the invasion the law is also a problem. It is missing, disrespected and casually violated by different groups of terrorists, militias and Islamists. They participated in creating a dangerous place where “corpses ripped apart by car bombs, bloated bodies from the riverbed, and many other stupid ones that had been finished off in random murders. . . . The morgue itself overflowed with corpses from those stupid acts of terrorism” (Blasim 8). It is the same place where schoolchildren are “multitude by car bombs or incinerated in some street market or broken into pieces after plain bombs houses” (Blasim 8).

To deploy those themes, Blasim uses slogans and foul language along with blasphemous expressions. Blasim believes that it is impossible to talk about daily violence and people’s death in standard Arabic. He thinks speaking about Iraq needs new style and form. For that reason he makes use of colloquial in the Arabic version and crosses all the boundaries of the Arabic literature. Blasim states that:

religious discourse and political regimes have held back the potential for sooner advancements in literature. If this is accurate, it is not negative. It instead moves the writing away from genre tropes and allows the writing to use the devices to actually explore the idea of the future on a more creative and symbolic level in a globalized world where attachment to language, censorship and cultural exchange play a much bigger part in what could lead authors into abstraction and different means of storytelling. (Lydia Beardmore)

Blasim succeeds in crossing the boundaries of standard Arabic language and religion because today’s reader doesn’t need to dig deep in the beauty of the language and forgetting the

picture that Blasim draws. In almost all the collection, he includes vulgar language and swear words to show that terrorists use different forms of abuse to humiliate the ordinary Iraqi civilian. It also shows how Iraqis use colloquial and that Blasim is dealing with something familiar to the Iraqis. It enables him to picture Iraq as a place where death even hunts school age children leaving their body parts and blood to water the asphalt.

4.3 Lu'ay Hamza Abbas: "Closing his eyes" Stories of silently tortured Iraqis

Lu'ay Hamza Abbas is an Iraqi writer and a scholar from a generation older than the writers discussed so far. He lived all his life in Basra-Iraq, and witnessed all the tragedies of modern Iraq. He started writing as early as the 1990s and received the Iraqi Narrative Creativity Award in 2009. Abbas witnesses the changes in the political Iraqi scene not only as a writer but also as a scholar and a professor at the University of Basra. Therein Basra is a different scene from Baghdad, it's a coastal city where he sees the beauty of the sea and the destruction of his city at the same time. He stayed in Iraq in spite of all the chances to leave the country. He and all the Iraqis watching and listening to the news stating that the invasion and the new governments is a chance for change and that all the participant parts in the 2003 invasion declared that the war is a win. Moreover those parts exterminate terror and Iraq shall be living in peace forever. He aspires to a new moment, a moment of peace that he and all his fellow citizen are eager to experience. Unfortunately, those claims were only on the news that soon started to stream broadcasts that Iraq is moving to a bottomless chasm. New headlines in media stating that daily violent attacks, car bombs and they prognosticate an outbreak of a sectarian war that will be the new face of Iraq. From that time on, Abbas is sure that life in Iraq is unbearable. He suggests not to trust those who pretend to be honest

and who have resulted in the destruction of the country. The new government is not better than the old he says:

The exclusion and humiliation of the Shi'ite oppressed parties against their Iraqi Shiite masses from 2003 until today exceeds what Saddam Hussein's regime did in its thirty-six years. The Shi'ite politicians did not engage in anything but two matters, the first: their own interests and corruption, and the second: the exit of Iraq finally from the orbit of his Arabism and toppling the last national feature of his features.

He is sure after seeing their achievements that this government is going to bring no peace to Iraq. Therefore, he asks for change and not to surrender to hope, because "excessive hope is scary. Excessive belief in history's promise of justice" (Cited in Boukaba). He doesn't trust the different claims for a better Iraq, because he sees no change. The new Iraq and its "violent post-2003 national landscape" is a major theme in his writings (Bahooora, the dismembered nation, 188). His writing "has a kind of distillation of pain leading to a smile similar to the cry of the fetus when he joined life. It was a philosophical choice that gave his text an existential depth that drew it from degrading romanticism on many Arab narrative experiences" (Abdel-Razzaq Boukaba). He, like Abbas and Antoon rejects Romanticism and instead they convert to more realistic treatment of the present. But unlike them, especially Blasim, he appreciates the depth of the Arabic Language and its ability to depict the Iraqi misery perfectly. Thus, his narratives appear hard to understand, full of complicated stories of regular people thriving though daily practices.

In *Closing his Eyes*, the collection under study, he shows interest in depicting a moment of life that summarizes years of pain and fear. Consequently his writings are characterized by their "intensity". His stories are very short some of them are one page long, but the reader can find the meaning of life and death through those moments. He believes that the moment is as precious as a whole life and once a moment is wasted a life is wasted too. That motivates him to see life

differently. Abbas sees in the moment the whole process of life and death, therefore he tries to choose different moments of the Iraqis in their daily life before and after 2003 invasion.

His 2010 short story collection *Closing his Eyes* covers some of the main themes of contemporary Iraqi political tragedies. Throughout, the collection connects violence to the mentality of the Iraqi citizen. Therefore he presents another important representation of horror in this text that is different from that of Blasim and Saadawi. The collection is part of his recent literary production that is translated into English By Yasmeeen Hanoosh. Here we will see Abbas choosing moments of deep pain that help those experiencing it to escape their miserable reality. The stories depict how power was used and abused before and after. His stories are mostly set in Basra, his home town and are about Iraqi individuals who live or lived there. The connection between the city and the characters is vital to Abbas since he loves his city and he is saddened to see all the miseries and tragedies targeting it and his whole country. In the following pages we will go over some of the stories of those individuals and will see the effect of violence on them. In the collection he demonstrates how painful is to hope for peaceful life then see pain and destruction instead. Violence for him is inescapably physical and mental, and in his writings he tries to show how deep its effects are and how hard it is to escape it. Like his fellow writers, he discovers that “in the process of staging spectacles of extreme violence, these texts produce a historical ontology that locates violence as a consequence of the political, legal, and material legacy of decades of war and dictatorship” (Bahooora, the dismembered 189). It is assured that the political violence itself is not a recent phenomenon, but is as old as the Iraqis can remember. War, dictatorship and more wars all helped in establishing the culture of violence as part of the political and social Iraqi environment. The way it developed over the course of war make it a new topic to study especially

after the disappearance of the censorship. Therefore Abbas tries to dramatize some of those aspects in his text.

4.3.1 “Closing His Eyes”

The story follows an Iraqi citizen, who works as a cashier in a health care center. He rides his bicycle to and from the center daily in the streets of Basra in no more than fifteen minutes. He rides on the pavement and waits until the street is almost clear of cars to close his eyes and escape his reality. It doesn't happen daily, but when it does “that momentary state would fill him with a rare sense of happiness that would last him the whole day” (Abbas 27). Even after arriving at his destination, he keeps himself in darkness. He is not interested in chatting with any other employee at the center or with the visitors. The only thing that interests him is the moment of silence when he can close his eyes and dream. In his daydream he sees a gray world, but it is quiet, peaceful and makes him happy. He keeps himself busy with his job's requirements and prepare for the next day's calls. He does all that while he is still under the control of the gray world of the closed eyes.

Suddenly, in the middle of his tranquility, his eyes fall on the backyard of the health center, where there is a big empty field. He sees a car approaching, the driver descends to smoke while two other men drag a third blind folded person. One of the two men forces the blind folded to sit while the other shots him three times. The two men get in their car leaving the dead on the floor. The cashier sees all this and does nothing, he doesn't call the police or even go down to check on the victim. On his way home, in spite of the empty streets he is able to close his eyes but he can see nothing. Everything vaporized from his vision, leaving him empty headed.

The story is very short and direct in its treatment of the one themes of contemporary Iraqi life. Abbas here handles the issue of random acts of violence and shows how violence saturates

the Iraqis' daily practices. The life changing moment that Abbas is interested in is the same moment that the chaser sees the group killing the blind folded man. That violent moment violates the beauty and tranquility of the unnamed cashier. He sees death in front of him approaching another person but he cannot prevent it. Death controls the scene as it crawls like darkness into the heart and bodies of the Iraqis through a series of violent attacks. Death is there in daylight, illegal and brutal haunting the lives of Iraqis one by one. The story also carries hints to the theme of missing Iraqis that I will discuss later as it appears in another story as well.

4.3.2 "A Much Traveled Man"

"A Much Traveled Man" talks about a man who travels once or twice a week between Basra and Baghdad for work. That is his route for years. On the way to his work, he is preoccupied by different phone calls and is thinking about the arrival time. He always sees the signs and the scenes outside the car different though they are the same. This is because he is always busy with his phone or thinking about his job. On his last trip and few kilometers away from Baghdad "he is slaughtered on the roadside. Just like that, for no reason – or for a remote or unlikely reason" along with all the passengers in the car. Although dead, his eyes remain open and he continues to see even after his killers leave:

The heads are severed from the bodies. Some heads have gaping eyes and thick white film begins to cover them. . . he opened his eyes as the taste of the brackish earth intensified in his mouth. He put his hands on the ground and stood up. In his head, which had not been severed from his body, the voices still resounded, mingling with the groans of the bodies as they were being slaughtered" (Abbas 30).

Being able to stand he shakes off the dust of his body and he feels so light and flexible. He is saddened because cars will pass by him and the rest of the victims and will watch them without paying attention. He will appear in the passengers' stories differently and will die every time. The

passengers will “recount the incident” with changes in details or recount another incident with different circumstances. The man himself used to see such incidents before being killed but he is too busy to talk about them or even think about them. He decides to go home, he feels he can arrive faster than the passing cars and their astonished passengers. He doesn’t consider himself as the walking dead, or a ghost or a spirit, he is simply the person who travels a lot. He arrives home and goes into the bedroom where “he reclines on the bed. The cut on lower part of his neck looks closer in hue to black. His wife enters the room . . . she looks at him and is terrified as she finds him starring at the ceiling, a thick white film begins to cover his eyes” (Abbas 31). The story ends there, with him gazing with his eyes wide open to the ceiling as if he is looking for answers to unanswered questions. The violence, the way of killing itself, the uninterested passerby the reasons for killing and the killers.

Like “Closing His Eyes”, “A Much Travelled Man” shows how Iraqis live under a government that is unable to protect its citizens. Iraqis are killed daily without mercy because there is no law to protect them. Death and violence affects the lives of both the dead and the living. The dead by taking away their right to live with a knife or a bullet. The living by affecting their mentality. The stories show a form of psychological horror. Some of the stories have a supernatural element like the walking dead, others focus on what happen in the subconscious. Both texts try to show how violence descends into the subconscious and works from there on changing the life of its inhabitant . “In a much travelled man” Abbas gives his character the ability to see themselves after their death. He is left there in the middle of the way among many corpses “the heads are severed from the bodies. Some heads have gaping eyes, and a thick white film begins to cover them” (Abbas 46). The ability to move with a severed head and see other bodies lying down is

another level of horror in the Iraqi texts. To succeed in this Abbas focuses more on the realistic power of psychological pain. He sees violence and depicts it, and use it serve his themes.

In “Closing his Eyes” Abbas shows how the Iraqis learn to deal with visual violence by escaping it, not facing it. The main character tells nobody about what he sees that moment or even before, he only closes his eyes. That act of closing the eyes could take away death from the routine of his vision, but sometimes it cannot. On his way back home, all he can see is the same scene which repeats itself with his hands shaking and his head moving as if he is the one who has been shot. This scene indeed shows more than violence and its effect on the subconscious. It summaries the bleak years post 2003. Bahooora suggests that “the violence witnessed by the cashier—its routine, public nature—is juxta-posed with his mundane, monotonous tasks” (Bahooora 204). It changes everything around it as it invades it, even the old places the moments of tranquility, dreams, and the crowded streets are not the same. The physical body of the human as well as the psychological are both invaded by violence. He even suggests that you can escape it physically but mentally you are not unscathed. This is so because:

The subconscious becomes the metaphysical playground for enacting the residue of daily violence. Unlike the opening scene of Antoon’s *The Corpse Washer*, which relays a dream sequence to the reader in which the residue of witnessed violence colonizes one’s sleep, for the anonymous protagonist of ‘Abbas’ short story, the violent spectacle has invaded his only waking refuge. (Bahooora 205)

Therefore even the simplest act of closing the eye will no longer be the refugee’s destination. Because closing the eyes will not take him to a peaceful world or allow him to escape reality. This atmosphere changed the Iraqis mentally, Hussein Cermak Hassan elaborates that “The dread of death has died in the hearts of people, their feelings have disbanded, and they can speak fluently about the incident” or just closing their eyes and ignore it. Hassan believes that Abbas is showing

the impact of the invasion on Iraqis and their relation with death. He believes that Iraqis are not interested in escaping or fighting it. The fact that death is inescapable is living in them now because all their attempts to escape it has failed:

The most terrible thing that has happened to the Iraqi society in recent decades, especially after the occupation, is the lack of fear of death. That awe that was the root cause of the maturity of the old Iraqi character, this maturity that put him at the heart of civilization creation, while the people - in all corners of the earth - are led to death, Gilgamesh, emerged strongly protest and wonder: Why do I die? he tried to eliminate the distance between the earth and the sky and between man and God through getting eternity. This means that death was a problem for the Iraqi, which is linked to the strength of personality. But now death is no longer a problem. It became a daily incident after it was an existential dilemma. It became an act of man after it was a function of God.

The characters are trying to live their daily lives with and without death. They appear submissive to its will while still going on in their daily missions and finishing their chores. Even when they emigrate the world of death and live in different places, the effect of death leaves with them. “the characters who half inhabit the new world emigrated to and yet remain in Basra, their eyes unable to forget violence that has become everyday”(<http://lattin-rawstrone.com/2016/10/02/closing-his-eyes-by-luay-hamza-abbas/>).

Yasmeen Hanoosh, the translator of the text from Arabic to English believes in Abbas’s artistic ability to “locate the textual balance between imaginary and factual events allows his fiction to portray the experience of war and to historicize the subjective encounter with violence and death without reiterating political events or explicitly invoking the often-employed symbols of Iraqi authoritarianism” (Hannosh, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/wll_fac/15/). The collection in its shortest stories is able to reflect the Iraqis momentary encounter with death, violence and horror. Abbas attempts to record the daily reality, which is burdened by tragedies, and is successful in exposing the crisis of contemporary Iraqis. They show how to keep on living

in such a world while experiencing moments of fear and anticipation of death; inescapable as much as you try to catch life. At the end of the day what is left is a divided, tortured silently and submissive human being.

4.4 Missing Persons

In contemporary Iraq the issue of missing persons is of great concern. It is so not only because persons are going missing but also because the manners of their disappearances vary. For decades Iraqis “have suffered from the successive armed conflicts, the oppressive practices of the former regime, from years of violence after 2003 and from terrorist crimes committed by Daesh (ISIS). . . Too many lives have been lost, and countless families remain without news about their missing relatives” As Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi states (Usaid Siddiqui 2). This issue troubled Iraqis over time because families missed their loved ones bitterly and suffer.

People are disappearing in Iraq and in mysterious ways. They live in a state of “Enforced Disappearance” as Dirk Adriaenssens calls it in an article entitled as “Always someone’s mother or father, always someone’s child. The missing persons of Iraq”. He states that “Iraq has the most disappeared persons in the world” (1). “Enforced disappearance” is a term that is defined by the United Nations General Assembly On 20 December 2006 as:

the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law. (Adriaenssens 1)

Recently in Iraq people of different ages including, school children, teachers, doctors, activists, journalists, shop owners, scavengers and even soldiers go out to practice their daily life

and they never come back. Though Iraq is a “member of the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons against Enforced Disappearances since 23 November 2010, and was the 20th country to implement its ratification” (Adriaenssens 1). By missing persons Adriaenssens means “those whose families are without news of them and those who are reported, on the basis of reliable information, unaccounted for as a result of an international or non-international armed conflict” (2). People keep going missing, they have been slaughtered like sheep with their eyes open to the sky wondering why. Or their bodies vanish after being targeted by an exploded truck. They have also disappeared with no bloody mist or even a limb return to their families. This act, despite the circumstances qualifies it as a “crime against humanity, and thus it is not subject to a statute of limitations” (Adriaenssens 1). Therefore, Adriaenssens assures that the issue of missing persons is of concern to both human rights and the international laws. Both organizations oppose any act of violence that place persons as missing for any reason and stress that those acts should end in Iraq.

The theme of the missing person has been a motif throughout the gothic texts I have examined. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, we see that the body of Hassib, the hotel guard, has vanished. Hasib Mohamed Jaffar is an Iraqi citizen who is “twenty one years old, dark, slim, and married to Dua Jabbar. He lived with Dua and their baby daughter, Zahraa, in Sector 44 in Sadr City, in a room in the house of his large family”. To support his families need, Hasib worked as a “guard at the Sadeer Novotel hotel”. One night, Hassib was confronted by

Sudanese suicide bomber driving a dynamite-laden garbage truck stolen from the Baghdad municipality. The bomber was planning to crash through the hotel’s outer gate, drive the truck into the hotel lobby, and detonate the explosives, bringing down the whole building. He failed because the guard bravely fired several rounds at the driver, causing him to detonate the explosives early. (Saadawi 74)

Hassib was killed in that explosion and “In the coffin they put his burned black shoes; his shredded, bloodstained clothes; and small charred parts of his body. There was little left of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar”. The rest of Hassib’s body is better than nothing. Some families receive nothing of their missing ones. Antoon’s text *The Corpse Washer*, also shows that Hamoudy disappears without any details about his disappearance. Hamoudy is Jawad’s father assistance, he is now in charge of the Maghaysil (Shrouding house).

He went to the Shorja market one Thursday at the end of August. . . . Hammoudy did not come back home that day, nor the following day. His cell phone was turned off and he didn’t respond to the text messages that his wife and his brother, who worked at an electronics store, had sent him. There had not been any bombs or explosions at the Shorja market that day—or even that month. For two days they looked for him in the hospitals nearby and went to police stations without coming up with anything. People told them to go to the morgue. His brother looked at all the photos they had of all the bodies piled up everywhere in that place, which couldn’t cope with the numbers, but found nothing. He looked in the mounds of corpses for the green ring Hammoudy used to wear on his left hand. He still goes there from time to time, asking, just in case something turns up. (Antoon 109)

It is hard to look for Hamoudy in the pile of bodies that were treated without any humanity, but still his brother hopes to find him or his body. No matter how many times Hamoudy’s mother visit the “al-Kazim’s shrine” pleading for her sons return, he is not, nor his body is found. Jawad goes “Kidnappers usually call the family to demand a ransom and never deliver the body until they get their money, or some of it. No one ever called. Hammoudy never came back, even though his mother walked to Najaf three times” (Ibid). In the same text Antoon refers to this issue also through the character of Al-Fartusi. Al-Fartusi worked with Jawad’s father for ten years as he was “in charge of collecting unclaimed, abandoned, and unidentified corpses from hospitals and from the morgue. He saw to it that they were washed, shrouded, and properly buried” (Antoon 101). Jawad’s father helped in this charity to give peace to those bodies. Before 2003 the number of “abandoned”

was reasonable, as Al-Fartusi claims. After Hamoudy's disappearance, Al-Fartusi asks Jawad to help him shroud some of the "abandoned" bodies. After 2003 the number of those bodies increased dramatically.

Every day of the week was difficult, but Thursday was the day al- Fartusi's refrigerated truck arrived with the weekly harvest of death: those who were plucked from their families and lives, tossed into the garbage in Baghdad's outskirts, thrown into the river, or rotting in the morgue. Most of them had no papers or IDs and no one knew their names. Instead of names, I wrote down the causes of death in my notebook: a bullet in the forehead, strangulation marks around the neck, knife stabs in the back, mutilation by electric drill, head- less body, fragmentation caused by suicide bomb. (Antoon 131)

All of those bodies are victim to the pervasive nature of violence in Iraq. Al-Fartusi himself narrates what happen to the Army after invading Kuwait. He was in the army at that time and his unit was transferred to Kuwait. After the withdrawal from Kuwait, the American air craft targeted "every moving object on that highway as they "were hovering and hunting humans as if they were insects". Al-Fartusi saw his fellow soldiers "burning in their seats and whose remains were scattered all around us" as well as "stray dogs devouring soldiers' bodies near Basra" (Antoon 117). Those disturbing scenes motivated him to carry his mission and rescuing the dead bodies from rotten and stray dogs.

Blasim's work also shows incidents of disappearances in his text as we discussed earlier in the chapter. Therefore Abbas's stories emphasize the increased phenomenon of the missing persons in Iraq after the 2003 invasion with more details. Abbas's text is actually different from the texts studied earlier because he tells what happen to those victims. The aftermath of the violence, is the concern of Abbas. It is not the corpses that Jawad washes that traumatize him, it is their aftermath effect. With Hadi the idea is the same, the stitched up body is a source of pity and mourning, but the living creature is the result of all violence. It seems that the Iraqis are used to

seeing and experiencing violence, because it is unescapable, unstoppable and unsolvable. Their response to its aftermath is the a new literary form. “For both Antoon and ‘Abbas, the function of disembodiment is to depict such horror through the use of the supernatural precisely in order to register its horrors” (Bahoora 203).

Abbas shows how people leave their houses and never return, or may return in the form of walking dead. He shows how they are going missing. In the first story the cashier sees a kidnapped victim being killed by a group of unnamed persons. As he sees car stopping in the deserted field “he estimated that the car had broken down, and waited for the driver to get out to open the bonnet”. The driver goes out and stands by the door and starts smoking. “Two men got out of the car after him. One of them put his hand on the shoulder of the other, who was blindfolded, while pushing him toward the driver, who took hold of the man and forced him violently to his knees” (Abbas 29). Then one man shoots the blindfolded man three times. Then they leaves the scene, the cashier also move his eyes away from the scene.

The unnamed character in the second story falls victim to a different act of violence. He is not kidnapped or blindfolded, he is killed on his way to his work. He knows that no one is going to help him or take him back to his house. Because he sees corpses like his on his way to work and doesn’t bother himself to look at them. or report them to the police or just help them. Therefore he decides to wake up and walks home to die in his bed. He doesn’t want to die lonely in the middle of the way, where people are watching as they are passing by. This issue is also connected to the idea of “wrongful death” as Bahoora calls it. In “A Much Travelled Man” Abbas

situates the dead man, through depicting his afterlife, as living beyond his death in order to linger on his experience and his fate rather than focus on what it means for the living to witness death. The use of the supernatural again intervenes to resurrect the dead and to depart from the mundane reality of atrocities in Iraq—naturalized to such an extent that mass slaughter is routine. (Bahoora 203)

The Iraqis go missing and are being killed with or without intention at the hands of different killers because the country is living in a state of political instability. Had there been a law that is strong enough to protect the Iraqi citizen, none of the acts of violence will appear to surface. The absence of law then is the first component in the matrix of terror and fear that the Iraqis lived and are still living up to this day. Because literature is special to Iraqis and is of great importance to them, authors discuss such major issues in their texts. Those authors are fighting for justice and peace by presenting the picture of gothic Iraq to the readers. Their attempts are to awaken their fellow citizens and induce in them the spirit of revival. They criticize the Iraqi politics, society and citizen as the main reason for death. They see that war, sectarianism, and terrorism are all crimes against humanity. They also succeeded in proving that the outcome of the relation between politics and humans in Iraq is death. They stress that for the Iraqi citizen to live he/she needs to be tortured, traumatized, and silenced. Their enthusiasm towards gothic makes them creative. Gothic gives voice to the good and the evil to talk, express their sufferings and telling their stories. But it mostly succeeded in letting violence appear to the surface. Violence targets all Iraqis and put authors in amazement especially after the American led invasion. They wonder on its nature and motifs. From Blasim's point of view, violence is the way to fame, fortune and respect. His characters appear violent and powerful who uses violence senselessly. For Antoon violence targets civilians only leaving their bodies with signs of torture and their sights in the minds of the living. While Saadawi sees violence everywhere, it targets the civilians and the terrorists all at once. Out of that violent atmosphere a creature comes to life to create more violence. That use is justified for the continuation of the Ideal Iraqi citizen. Abbas thinks that violence is everywhere, even in the person's imagination.

These different representations of violence take us back to gothic. These author succeed in laying down the foundation of gothic. Those texts are among the experimental gothic product of the Iraqis. Iraq is full of many untold stories and the present generation carries tales of horror and awe that needs to be told. The coming future is going to carry lots of gothic texts that will unfold new insights to the worlds of criminality and terror. Since it gives a chance to the dead to talk, gothic will continue to appear as death is strike.

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